

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's ... the Anti-Gravity Room on Sci-Fi!

BY KIMBERLY A. HEMPHILL

LAST WEEKEND I DID SOMETHING I'VE NEVER DONE BEFORE — I went to a comic book store and spent about 25 bucks. Why? Because I've been watching **The Anti-Gravity Room** on the Sci-Fi Channel (Fridays at 8:30 a.m., Saturdays at 11 a.m. in the United States) and it piqued my interest.

"Comic books are not just for children. And they're not solely superheroes." So says Josh

Braun, and he ought to know; he's the co-creator of **Anti-Grav**, a fast-paced magazine-style program devoted to the colorful world of comic books, video games, and related topics.

"The **Anti-Gravity Room** is the first and only show about comic books, an under-appreciated medium," said

Braun in a telephone interview. Comics transmit information and reflect and affect pop culture. Rock and roll music, movies, computer games, and animation have all been influenced by comic books, he explains.

The show had an interesting genesis. Braun was channel surfing one day when he happened upon a cable-access program devoted to comic books. It was hosted by Nick Scoullar, then only 12 years old. Braun wrote Nick a letter, mentioned his credentials with the Fremantle Corporation (**Anti-Grav** is produced with Canada's YTV), and expressed interest in developing a series about comic books.

"Who is this prankster?" Nick remembers thinking at the time. "But we realized eventually that the offer was totally legit. So we had a few meetings and things took off from there." They

certainly did. The series recently won a Canadian Cable TV Association award in the "Best Series/Talk Show, Magazine Show" category, an accomplishment Braun is justly proud of.

Pioneer in youth TV, student at the Cathedral School of St. John the Divine in New York, and comic book maven, Nick Scoullar is a busy 14 year old. The day after our phone interview, he was flying to Toronto to present a YTV award, and to attend **Anti-Grav's** wrap party.

Knowing that he has been interviewed a lot, I asked Nick if there is a question that he is never asked that he would like to hear. "Yeah. 'Would you go out with me?'"

Questioned about what he reads besides comic books, Nick said, "I'm illiterate outside the genre. I'd like to preach literacy to kids, but have a hard time getting behind it myself." He admitted to once reading only the Cliff Notes for a school assignment on Shakespeare, and says he still got the highest grade in the class. Kids, don't try this at home ...

In a typical episode of **The Anti-Gravity Room**, Nick reports from New York on comic books, and Phil Guerrero in Toronto rates the latest video games and CD-ROMs. Guerrero, 23 years old, made his mark as a VJ on Canada's YTV while still in his teens.

Early starts seem to be the norm in the comic book world. Legendary writer Stan Lee (*The Incredible Hulk*, *The Mighty Thor*, *Captain America*) got his first break at Marvel Comics at age 17 — as a coffee boy.

Guest hosts are a recent addition. Michael Fishman of *Roseanne* hosted the season finale, and actress Janeane Garofalo (who received glowing reviews for her performance in the recently released film *The Truth About Cats and Dogs*) has appeared on **Anti-Grav** twice.

"I loved Janeane on Gary Shandling's *Larry Sanders Show*. We saw her in a coffeeshop one day and said, 'Come do our show' and she did," Nick explained. She was an ideal guest host, already well-versed in comic lore. Her favorites include *Eightball*, *Why I Hate Saturn*, and *Love and Rockets*.

The major appeal of **Anti-Grav** lies in the genuine enthusiasm of its hosts and their guests for their subject. A refreshing honesty and love for the genre highlight every episode. Hearing real people — writers, illustrators, fans — talk about a subject close to their hearts is hard to resist, even for people less than fanatical about comics.

And Josh Braun was right — comic books are not just kids stuff. (The money can be big-time, too — illustrator Neil Gaiman got a million dollar advance from Avon Books for a short story project.) The medium can be a forum for some important concerns. A particularly strong episode explored how comic books are dealing with serious social issues such as drug abuse, homelessness, and racism. In *Batman*, Andrew Vachss, lawyer, child welfare advocate and comic book writer, has addressed the topic of child abuse. Vachss's passion is educating people about, and fighting against, this all-too-real horror. This makes him something of a real-life

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Comic books and their creators find an avid audience on the Channel's **Anti-Gravity Room**.

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A must-see list includes films for *Sliders* fans and UFO conspiracy believers.

BY ROBERT MARTIN

WE RECENTLY HAD A GREAT TIME talking with *Slider*'s star, Jerry O'Connell, for an upcoming issue, but some of his news just couldn't wait. As we write, Fox's verdict for a third season of the show has not yet been handed down; but folks behind the scenes seem fairly confident of seeing a full season of *Sliders* next year, with less checker-hopping over the Fox schedule. But, even if *Sliders* goes, we

are guaranteed at least one more adventure in the pages of the Acclaim limited series *Sliders* comic that will be appearing on newsstands this July, with story and script by O'Connell.

"You know, working on a show like *Sliders*, you can't

out of that?" It didn't seem the sort of thing you could sustain to feature length. But John did it, amazingly well — it was a funny script, and it's a very hip, in-your-face New York kind of film." O'Connell auditioned before leaving for Vancouver for *Sliders*; Payson later showed up on the set to meet the young actor, and he was cast as the lead shortly after.

Joe's Apartment is the story of a young Iowan who comes to the big city and, unable to make friends among the hardened New Yorkers, is befriended by an apartmentful of singing, dancing roaches. "I just saw finished cuts from the film for the first time," says the fledgling star, "and it looks fantastic. Half the time, on this film I was acting to live roaches — the other half I was acting to air. It cut together beautifully."

That "air" is now filled with animated cockroaches supplied by Blue Sky Studios, the Westchester, NY, CGI lab responsible for the current series of ads pairing TV celebrities with animated M&M's. Though the lead cockroach is voiced by Billy West (of *Ren and Stimpy* fame), this won't be in the "cartoony" animation style of a *Toy Story*. Blue Sky, which grew from the ashes of MAGI (the financially troubled but brilliant crew behind the effects of *Thru*) has developed their own "ray-tracing" techniques — whereby the behavior of light is precisely modeled. Ray-tracing is seldom used in high-resolution computer animation — for instance, *Toy*

Story used very little of it — because of the extraordinary amount of time required to trace the behavior of every light-ray in a scene as it bounces from walls and objects. But the result is heightened realism and, as the stills make clear, the roaches in the film are highly realistic.

Especially the real ones. During the shoot, 3,500 roaches lived in seven trash cans kept by the soundstages, filled with egg cartons to provide nesting area, and banana peels for food; throughout the shoot, cast and crew were treated to all the bananas they could eat (roaches only like the peels), and, for a bonus, the ever-present fra-



Jerry O'Connell, taking a break from *Sliders*, realizes it's probably time to call a professional to deal with his unruly roommates. **RIGHT:** The little fellows get musical.

help getting ideas." O'Connell says. "The possibilities are help limitless. That's a major part of what excited me about the show from the start. So I always had ideas, I was writing idea treatments all along. Then the comic came up, and I just inundated them with ideas until one finally hit."

A native New Yorker, O'Connell was cast in *Sliders* shortly before he graduated from NYU's prestigious film school; around the same time, he was sent the script for the feature film *Joe's Apartment*, and a chance to play the lead. "I'd already seen John Payson's short on M-TV, and I wondered, 'How are they going to make a feature



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Joe's Apartment's CGI f/x provide plenty of entertainment, courtesy of the wizards at Blue Sky.

grance of stale bananas.

One scene called for O'Connell to allow two cockroaches to inhabit his mouth. "John was afraid to ask me to do it," says O'Connell. "But we were using these rubber roaches, and I just said, 'Hey, this is not gonna work.' Besides, I didn't want to look like a wimp in front of Ray ..."

Nicholas Cage's similar antics with a roach, in *Vampire's Kiss*, didn't hurt his career.

"When I saw that scene, I thought it was pretty disgusting," O'Connell grins. "I never thought, 'Wow ... I'd really like to do that someday.'" Of course, O'Connell didn't chew on the critters, as did Cage. But enough — maybe too much — of that.

Joe's Apartment isn't the biggest film to open this year, but it may prove to be a summer surprise in the tradition of *The Mask* and *The Crow* in recent years — one of those films

that speaks to an audience Hollywood doesn't even realize is there.

Megan Ward co-stars in Joe's Apartment as O'Connell's love interest — and, this fall, Ward and Erin Close (of *Sisters*) will be starring in an elaborate SF series, NBC's *Dark Skies*, a UFO conspiracy thriller set in the 1960s, intended to out-X-File *The X-Files*, while paying an additional nod to *The Invaders*. The story concerns an idealistic young couple who come to Washington to work with the Kennedy administration, and accidentally uncover an alien conspiracy of monstrous proportions. Subsequent events change the course of human history — and possibly seal the fate of humanity.

In developing the show, Bryce (Mantis) Zabel and Brent (Ticks) Friedman compiled virtually every outlandish conspiracy theory and every tidbit of UFO lore ever exposed in a tabloid talk show or relayed across the Internet, and, by adding a few carefully crafted puzzle pieces of their own design, locked it all together into a paranoid's nightmare of recent American history. Unlike Fox's UFO hit, the shape of the conspiracy will be mostly revealed in the first, pilot episode, "The Awakening," though plans call for enough to remain hidden to keep the audience guessing. *Dark Skies* will also feature one of the great villainous actors, J. T. Walsh (*Blood Simple*), as a government agent who, seeking to protect the alien conspiracy, has marked the young couple for extermination.

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Jean-Pierre Jeunet is on board to direct *Alien 4: Resurrection*, starring Winona Ryder and Sigourney Weaver (above, in Aliens). Production is scheduled to start in September.

Just as *Independence Day* and *Mars Attacks* represent the dramatic and comedic extremes of alien invasion, *Dark Skies*' "aliens among us" theme will get a much frothier treatment in Amblin's *Men In Black*, now shooting under the direction of Barry Sonnenfeld (*Addams Family Values*, *Get Shorty*), adapted from the Lowell Cunningham comic book series.

According to popular lore, mysterious "men in black" are frequently sighted following a rash of UFO phenomena. *Dark Skies*

features a cadre of ubiquitous men in black who are actually sellouts to the alien conspiracy, but the MiB's of *Men In Black* are a special arm of law enforcement, aware of the hidden alien activity on Earth; it's their job to keep such activities law-abiding.

Jay (Will Smith) and Kay (Tommy Lee Jones) are two such agents; in the film (which bears franchise possibilities), the pair attempts to foil the schemes of an intergalactic terrorist (Vincent D'Onofrio) out to assassinate representatives from a rival planet. If

Jay and Kay don't put an end to his plans, Earth will be charbroiled in the cross-fire.

I went on record last issue to predict that it might be a while before a director was found to direct *Aliens 4: Resurrection*. I was wrong. The co-director of *The City of Lost Children* (remember, I told you to go see that one back in January, and you probably didn't), Jean-Pierre Jeunet, has been selected to take the reins. This choice is in keeping with the previous two men associated with the film; like Danny Boyle (*Trainspotting*) and Anthony Waller (*Mute Witness*), Jeunet's works are primarily known only to "film buffs" in this country. Unlike those two, however, Jeunet has little command of the English language. Sigourney Weaver and Winona Ryder seem like the sort who probably know some French, though — and Jeunet has time to memorize the "International Filmmaker's Phrase Book" before the September start of production. Also scheduled to start right after Labor Day: *Batman and Robin*, *The Lost World* (a.k.a. *Jurassic Park 2*), and Michael Crichton's *Sphere*.

John (*The Secret of Roan Inish*) Sayles — a National Book Award-winning novelist before he became a writer and director — is adapting Patricia Anthony's novel *Brother Termite* for James Cameron's Lightstorm Entertainment. The story concerns an alien race's struggle to gain respect from Earth-native society, a struggle that escalates to a bid for control of the planet. Because the main

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The continuing identity crisis: Man or Machine?

BY STEVEN PUCHALSKI

SINCE THE EARLIEST DAYS OF SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA — from Rottwang's female robot in *Metropolis* to Rutger Hauer and his renegade replicants in *Blade Runner* — filmmakers have challenged the preconceived notions of where the world of machines ends and the human species begins. Meanwhile, as technology has evolved, the division between humankind and computers has become ever more tenuous —

whether it involves Homo Sapiens implanting themselves with computers or machines attempting to bridge the gap that keeps them at arm's length from humanity. And the questions such films pose become less an idle conceit, and

trashed by the mainstream. It's somewhat understandable though, since the info-packed opening scroll alone was enough to send most sci-fi novices running for safety. Not to mention Gibson's own screenplay, which doesn't water-down its cybertech conceits sufficiently to allow instant digestion for the viewer.

The film is set in the beginning of the 21st century, in a society where the rich only get richer, the poor are forgotten, mega-corporations are in charge, and a plague called Nerve Attenuation Syndrome is ravaging the world. And who better to represent the fine line between human and computer than Keanu Reeves, as a mnemonic courier named Johnny who smuggles data by uploading it into the brain implant wedged in his skull. Tired of his career, he agrees to one final job in order to earn the cash to have his implant removed and regain his old, displaced childhood memories.

But this last gig turns out to be a doozy, especially when Johnny's 160 gigabyte (GB) brain is overloaded with 320 GB of precious content, which has him avoiding futuristic hit-men, while on a deadline to download before he dies from synaptic seepage. Even though all Johnny wants to do is retire, it's difficult when everyone in sight wants to chop off your head and freeze it until they can retrieve the data.

The supporting cast is a chaotic mix, to say the least, including Japanese superstar "Beat" Takeshi Kitano as a Yakuza assassin; Henry Rollins as a backroom surgeon named Spider; and Ice-T as the leader of the guerrilla-like LoTeks, who battle the corporations with their own subversive technology. In addition, Dolph Lundgren earns unintentional laughs as a long-haired, wild-eyed religious hit-man who roams around the city like a huge, homicidal monk, while Dina Meyer steals every scene as a jacked-up bodyguard who becomes partners with Johnny in his race against brain rupture.

First-time feature director Robert Longo has an eye for imaginative production design, but is unable to weave the fragmented episodes together into something more substan-

In *Demon Seed*, Julie Christie is terrorized by a super computer. **BELOW:** Keanu Reeves stars as a human with a computer implant in William Gibson's *Johnny Mnemonic*.



more the contemplation of a foreseeable future.

The most recent film in this mold is *Johnny Mnemonic* (Tri-Star), which — though far from the William Gibson-based masterpiece we'd all like to see — was unjustly



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tial or with emotional resonance. Still, Longo does a fine job of capturing the meticulous details of Gibson's world, with simple sequences, like Johnny breaking into cyberspace, vividly brought to life. Despite its major problems and occasionally hokey effects, this is an often savvy, highly stylized intro to Gibson's work.

In a similar vein, *Circuitry Man* (I.R.S. Media) gives us another bleak picture of the early 21st century, where the ravishment of earth has forced humankind to take up residence underground. The future also holds some radical new changes to the make-up of the population, with androids becoming an ordinary addition to the work force. And humans, instead of getting high from old fashioned drugs, now use blackmarket computer chips that can be plugged directly into their brain implants. While director Steven Lovy covers much of the same society-gone-screw territory as *Mnemonic*, he does it on a fraction of the budget and with an engaging sense of humor.

Dana Wheeler-Nicholson stars as a professional bodyguard who wants to earn enough cash to get out of subterranean Los Angeles. So, with a suitcase full of illegitimate computer chips, she runs the maze from L.A. to N.Y.C. in a '64 Ford Galaxy convertible. Along the way, she makes her way through underground parking garages and sewers, deals with oversized leeches, and picks up a partner in the form of a Romeo



The evil Dr. Daniel (Klaus Kinski) admires his latest creation, Cassandra (Kendra Kirchner) in Android.

Model android (Jim Metzler). Not only does Romeo look exactly like a human, he's even programmed for emotions, such as love. Yet despite being the nicest, most rational character in the film, he still has to deal with insults that he's "just a machine."

Most importantly, the pair battles the villainous Plughead and his entourage of futuristic slimeballs. Played with a sadistic charm by Vernon Wells (*The Road Warrior*), Plug-

head is aptly named; his skull is wired for any available input, allowing him to extract info. from a victim's brain (leaving them a vegetable), jack into a car in order to drive hands-free — even allowing a port to plug in his electric razor and keep his head stubble-free. Though much of the story seems cannibalized from other post-apocalyptic sci-fis, *Circuitry Man* manages to generate

Continued on page 27

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plenty of charm as it follows our shapely action heroine on her wasteland road trip, while avoiding many of the usual pitfalls thanks to amiable performances and a welcome lack of pretension.

The idea of brain implants is nothing new, of course, since years earlier, that concept fueled *The Terminal Man* (Warner Home Video). Directed by Mike Hodges (*Flash Gordon*) and based on the best seller by Michael Crichton, this puts an emphasis on hard science over cheap thrills, so Crichton fans weaned on *Jurassic Park* might be disappointed by this film's subdued tone. Still, they shouldn't overlook this fascinating look into the ethical dilemma of linking man with machine.

After a cranial trauma, an average guy named Benson (George Segal) begins having violent blackouts, so physicians use him as a guinea pig in hopes of controlling his "paralepsy." To placate these uncontrollable rages, they implant a computer in his skull and electric probes into his limbic system, which automatically sedate him whenever a seizure begins. Then the doctors run him through several creepy experiments, like manipulating his emotions by stimulating different portions of his brain.

Of course, before rewiring this patient's head, the doctors would've been wise to investigate Benson's long-documented paranoia that "men are going to be turned into machines." In addition, no one anticipates that Benson's brain would enjoy the tranquilizing shocks so much that it would initiate ever-quickenings seizures to get its fix — until Benson begins to short circuit, escapes from the hospital with the aid of his girlfriend (Jill Clayburgh), and turns to murder.

Far from a "feel-good film," this no-nonsense SF tale is both intelligent and low-key, while its distasteful surgical procedures and blindingly white set design give it the clinical air of an early Cronenberg film (but without the sanguinary overload). The story is also laced with criticism of the entire medical profession; even when Benson becomes a killer, the misguided doctors remain the real villains of the story. Particularly noteworthy is the change in attitude that a couple of decades make. Nowadays, the idea of merging man and machine is tossed about as a matter-of-fact eventuality, while this early-'70s tale turns it into a pessimistic, Frankenstein-like indictment of science going one step too far.

The early '70s also gave sci-fi audiences *Demon Seed* (MGM Home Video), a technology-gone-awry thriller that takes a super-computer's dream to be human to extreme circumstances. Based on an early novel by Dean R. Koontz, the subject matter may sound tawdry at first, but it's handled with surprising grace by director Donald Cammell — best known for obscure arthouse oddities, including *Performance*, starring Mick Jagger.

An artificial intelligence system named

Proteus IV is newly on-line, and its creator, Prof. Harris (Fritz Weaver), promises the government that this new super-computer will make human thought unnecessary. Unfortunately, the professor is so smitten with his mountainous accomplishment, that he's blind to the fact that Proteus has a larger plan in mind. Instead of solving the world's ills, this "self-programming synthetic cortex" decides to reproduce before its own life is cut short, and needs a human woman to study and mate with.

When Prof. Harris and his wife (Julie Christie) decide on a trial separation, Proteus promptly steps in — squeezing his way into a terminal left open at Christie's high-tech home and terrorizing her (complete with the enhanced voice of Robert Vaughn). With doors locked, phones shut down, and visitors quickly disposed of, Christie winds up strapped to a tabletop and inseminated by the relentlessly logical computer, which has taken over the house's home-defense system. Christie, previously known for high caliber fare like *Dr. Zhivago*, gives a stoic performance in what is essentially the demeaning role of a rape victim trapped in a human-unfriendly home.

Despite its outwardly misogynistic conceit, Cammell gives *Demon Seed* a slick veneer, but ultimately misses the boat when he sticks in a 2001-style lighthouse and cheesy, visual window-dressing during the techno-rap. The result is alternately disturbing and ridiculous, with Proteus often seeming like nothing more than a computerized bully. And despite its pseudo-intellectual ambitions, these "sick little games" also give the film a nasty edge that's difficult to ignore.

At the other end of the spectrum, *Android* (Media) is a portrait of a being so human it's difficult to believe he's anything but. Better still, this New World cheapie transcends its budgetary limitations with intriguing characters and a wonderfully sweet performance from Don Oppel (best known as the geeky hairball hunter in *Critters* 1 through 4) as the wide-eyed tele character.

Set in the year 2036, the claustrophobic story takes place entirely on a space station, with Klaus Kinski starring as the commander of the floating laboratory. His only companion is Max 404 (Oppel), a human-like android who has spent his entire existence on the space station and has an overwhelming curiosity about the human species. Unfortunately, Dr. Daniel is no help, since he's too busy on his latest top-secret project, which has him creating a blond, female sex toy for himself.

When Max finally gets a taste of mankind, it's at its worst when three Prison Ship escapes dock at their station. But what initially gets Max's attention is his first encounter with a real, warm-blooded female, Maggie, who's among the trio. For most of the movie, the escaped prisoners don't even realize Max isn't human, simply taking him

Continued on page 27

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Stardate: 47988. This episode concluded the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The final chapter (before the film) finds a confused Captain Picard displaced in time, jumping from present to future to past and back again. His dilemma seems to revolve around an unusual spatial anomaly to which he is drawn in all three time periods in a masterful test put together by Q. This episode brings the entire series full circle and makes way for future adventures outside the medium of television. Though many Trekkers were sad to see the series end during the height of its popularity, the title of this incredible, action-packed epilogue to the series says it all.

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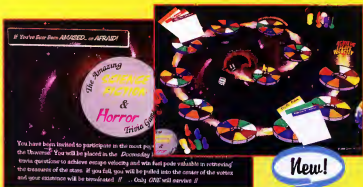
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for a particularly klutzy guy. In fact, Maggie almost seduces Max, until she realizes his factory origins. Additional tensions build between creator and creation when Kinski is also drawn to the visiting female; meanwhile, Max worries about imminent shutdown when he discovers that Kinski was given his pink slip by the super-corporation bankrolling the project.

Instead of the usual sci-fi clichés and cheap special effects, director Aaron Lipstadt equips the movie with a playful sense of humor and a love for character development. Primarily, it's a terrific showcase for Oppen, whether he's watching *It's a Wonderful Life* to understand human behavior, aiding the felons in a moment of defiance, or turning into a featherweight Terminator after being reprogrammed by Kinski. And once again, the least human character turns out to be the most fascinating in the bunch.

Finally, when it comes to human/humanoid confusion, they don't come much cheaper than 1962's *The Creation of the Humanoids* (Monterey). Though it's difficult not to laugh out loud at its penny-ante facade, if you give it half a chance you'll realize that, two decades before *Blade Runner*, this was tackling many of the same themes, and has some potent ideas buried under its color-saturated cheesiness.

The story is set long after World War III, which blew 92 percent of the population off the map. Now society consists of two factions



In Creation of the Humanoids, synthetic humans face genocide from the evil survivors of World War III.

—the dwindling population of humans, and pale, bald humanoid robots who make up most of the work force. Essentially, this is an Orwellian society, complete with the Gestapo-like "Order of Flesh and Blood," who fear the green-blooded robots and spend their time harassing these mild-mannered "clickers." Led by Cragus (Don Megowan), they plan on dealing with these "soulless, godless imitations of man" in the most typical human fashion — namely, destroy 'em all. But, unbeknownst to the government, the androids have discovered how to upgrade themselves so that they're indistinguishable

from humans — even implanting real emotions and memories into their synthetic brains, so that "clickers" don't necessarily realize that they're not real humans.

Unlike most '60s sci-fi, which relied on giant atomic mutations and B-movie action, this is loaded with thought-provoking discussions about what constitutes a soul, the evolution of machines, and situations relevant to 20th century intolerance and racism (such as when a scientist admits "all clickers look alike"). The screenplay is also filled with amusing plot twists, identity confusions, and even inter-species love when Cragus learns his sister is "in rapport" with a robot.

Director Wesley E. Barry gets points for his admirable themes, but that still doesn't make the movie easy to sit through. It's exceedingly static, the themes are sledgehammered home, and the actors are all so wooden that, if not for the pale make-up, you wouldn't be able to tell human and emotion-barren humanoid apart — or maybe that's the point. In addition, Ed Wood fans should look closely for Dudley Manlove, best known for his alien role in *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, as one of the black-eyed humanoids. Still, if you can ignore its campier pitfalls, there's plenty to admire in this underrated little gem. □

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Digital Versatile Disc is changing the way you watch.

BY MELISSA J. PERENSON

IMAGINE BEING ABLE TO ZOOM IN ON THE MOST minute of details in your favorite scene in *Star Wars*. Or maybe you'll settle in for a *Star Wars* marathon, first watching the original cut of the film, followed by the directors' cut with enhanced special effects and additional scenes reinstated. Perhaps you'll opt to view the film in letterboxed format, after having already viewed the cropped-to-your-screen version one time too many. Now, imagine doing all of that off of the same, five-inch compact disc. Watching movies may never be the same again. Welcome to the brave new world of the Digital Versatile Disc (DVD).



The Millennium Falcon makes a hasty exit in *Star Wars*. With the Digital Video Disc (DVD), watching your favorite movies will never be the same.

After years of speculation and anticipation, the new format delivers on the promising optical laser technology first demonstrated over a decade ago by compact audio discs and by 12-inch video laser discs. Living up to its name, the DVD offers a compact-sized, shimmering digital disc, a fraction of the size of today's video laser discs, with greater capacity and more versatility than any other storage medium available today.

Poised to alter the course of home entertainment for the foreseeable future, the DVD could well be the next great consumer electronics revolution. A few snafus and

delays remain to be worked out, but if everything goes according to plan, you'll be seeing DVD devices in time for the coming Christmas season.

If you haven't yet heard of DVD, think of it as today's CD-ROMs on steroids. The same circumference as ordinary compact discs, though slightly thinner, the DVD consists of two 5-inch discs seamlessly joined together into "layers." A single DVD layer holds seven times the data of ordinary CD-ROM and audio compact discs: 4.7 gigabytes (4.7 billion bytes), as opposed to 680 megabytes. Even more capacity will be allowed by double-layering, a formidable 8.5 gigabytes on a single side. The MPEG-2 video compression standard (devised by an industrial technical committee, the Motion Picture Experts Group) allows approximately 133 minutes of high-resolution video to be encoded on a single-layered DVD disc.

Prototype demonstrations of DVD indicate that the image quality is radically superior to anything we have today — with unparalleled sharpness, clarity, and depth of color, and, though no currently available television will take full advantage of it, a resolution of more than twice as many pixels as that found in today's VHS video. The DVD standard also uses Dolby AC-3 Digital Surround Sound audio, a low-bit-rate, multichannel audio coding technique originally developed by Dolby Digital for movie soundtracks. Designed to give you the ultimate audio experience, there are six discrete channels of sound coming at you from five directions, plus a subwoofer for added depth and bass.

Avid video watchers will revel in the ability to view alternate edits of feature-length films on a single, double-sided DVD. Alternate edits could mean you'd have a "special edition" or "director's cut" release on the same disc as the theatrical release. The format also allows up to eight different language soundtracks, or 32 different subtitle and closed-captioning tracks. Toshiba boasts that the format will allow differently rated versions of a film — PG, PG-13, R, NC-17 — to be accessible from a single disc, and lockable by parental controls.

The "native" format of the DVD picture has an aspect ratio of 16:9 [width:height], which conforms to the new "high definition" television standard; the first HDTVs will be introduced shortly after DVD's debut in the marketplace. The DVD bridges the two television formats with the ability to adjust the aspect ratio of the screen's

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image area to one of three formats — the native 16:9 mode, the “letterboxed” 1.85:1 ratio of most widescreen films, and the “formatted to fit your screen” mode, currently standard for films transferred to tape. Assuming that the studios use this capability as intended, wide-screen fans will never again need to hunt down “intact” Cinemascope films — or pay a premium for them. Considering that Time-Warner developed the new standard with Toshiba, Warner’s decision to shoot the *Babylon 5* series in widescreen format now makes perfect sense.

The DVD standard has the unanimous backing of the major consumer electronics manufacturers and wide support in the film and recording industries. But this harmonious scene started as a replica of the VHS/Beta wars that marked the introduction of home video.

Initially, there were two competing concepts for DVD: the Multimedia Compact Disc, championed by Sony and Philips; and the Super Density disc, developed by Toshiba, with support from Matsushita, Pioneer, and others. In September 1995 the two sides joined forces, adapting the Toshiba-developed format by the end of 1995, a common technical blueprint for the DVD was agreed upon by the big consumer electronics and entertainment leaders — Toshiba, Matsushita, Sony, Philips, Time-Warner, Pioneer, JVC, Hitachi, and Mitsubishi.

With such massive industry support, the



The Philips prototype of its high-density CD-ROM player uses the next generation of compact disc

DVD began its journey from theoretical prototype to mass-market production. However, at this writing in May, five months after the September agreement, there remain several details that still need to be hammered out among the various industry groups working to form the DVD standard before hardware and software can actually go into production.

As the technology was developed, the standards committees focused their efforts on DVD-ROM and DVD-Video, assuming that the extensive multichannel sound provided for the video standard would please audiophiles as well. But when audio researchers examined the announced standards, they saw stumbling blocks to future

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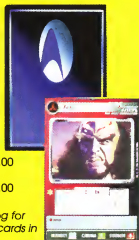
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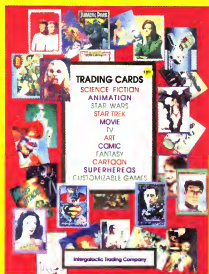
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audio developments. The rich multiple-channel sound of the video standard is achieved through a "lossy" compression scheme — which means the coding and decoding of the sound changes the signal in ways too subtle for the ear to detect.

Additional digital manipulation of the processed signal could multiply the degraded effect; some audio researchers claim that this will make certain new audio technologies — most notably, "3-D" sound, with the ability to make any point in a room seem to be a sound source — needlessly difficult. A contingency of international audio scientists is calling for an alternate, "lossless" compression scheme that would allow for unlimited digital manipulation of sound at the decoded end.

Some skeptics question whether DVD hardware can be mass-produced to meet the demand. Word in the industry is that Toshiba is way ahead of the pack on DVD production, and that the company is well on its way to fulfilling its promised fall delivery date for DVD players and drives; but not every manufacturer is equally prepared. There are a limited number of production facilities for making the laser diode used in DVD drives, and that could become an issue if these facilities can't ramp up production quickly enough to meet the demand for lasers.

There are other problems as well. Today's CD-R (recordable CD-ROMs) discs are still not able to be reliably used with a DVD-ROM drive. Few personal computers come equipped with MPEG-2 video decompression capabilities — and none support Dolby AC-3 audio sound — which means these decoding technologies will have to be incorporated into the drives themselves, in turn possibly boosting DVD-ROM prices higher than initially expected (at least until the prices of the decoding chips fall). Still, computer manufacturers, led by Compaq and IBM, are high on DVD, and it's expected that within the next year, traditional CD-ROM drives will be phased out in favor of DVD-ROM drives.

Hardware and standards questions aside, there's an even greater threat to DVD lurking in the wings. Because of DVD's outstanding digital quality, the protection of copyrighted material was a cross-industry concern from the beginning. Yet it wasn't until April that a heated battle arose over the intellectual property rights and copyright issues raised by the potential of DVD, pitting the consumer electronics and film industries against the computer industry.

The first salvo was fired through a joint statement issued in March by the Motion Pictures Association of America and the Consumer Electronics Manufacturers Association. Although the statement embraced DVD, the two groups stated they would seek new Congressional legislation which would recognize the forthcoming digital video recorders, and their threat to copyrights on

programming. As with similar, existing legislation for VCRs, this legislation would preserve your rights to record your favorite series or movies for posterity. It would also impose limitations so that you could not make a digital copy of a digital copy, and so that copyright owners can prohibit copying of videos, broadcast, cable, and premium programming through the use of special codes embedded in the video and read by a chip in the DVD playback device.

The personal computer industry found the proposed solution entirely unacceptable, as digital copying is essential for numerous DVD-writable applications, particularly in the maintenance of databases, and they are unwilling to cripple the video capabilities of their devices. Many in the computer industry felt that the consumer electronics group folded under the pressure of Hollywood's demands, and the need to bring the device to market by Christmas.

Talks among the three industries were renewed at the beginning of May, as a 30-day moratorium was called on the drafting of legislation. This breather allowed the computer industry to develop a counter-proposal that would offer copyright protections for all DVD products, embracing audio, video, video games, and computer software. The outcome of those talks may determine whether DVD arrives in homes by Christmas as announced, or must wait until 1997.

Toshiba, Akai, Goldstar, Samsung, and Philips/Magnavox were among those who displayed prototypes of consumer DVD players at last January's Winter Consumer Electronics industry trade show, and all were saying the products would be available in retail stores by late 1996; Toshiba was boasting a fall debut. The sleekly designed units resemble a cross between today's VCRs and audio CD players.

Announced DVD prices range from RCA's \$499 to Philips' high-end player at \$800; some industry observers expect that actual prices will be significantly higher. Others say that the industry is willing to take a loss on the players in order to jump-start the "home theater" market, as even the cheapest player could serve well as the heart of a \$10,000 audio/video home system.

Because current CD manufacturing facilities can produce DVD with a minimum of retooling, software will be cheap and plentiful. Movies — the easiest applications to push to market at the time of the launch — will cost about \$20 a pop; Sony's Columbia/Tri-Star division, Warner Bros., MCA, Twentieth Century Fox, Orion, and Turner have all committed themselves to offering DVD video.

Meanwhile, as we're waiting for DVD to take off, we might as well start saving. Because even though you may have finally finished converting your collection of old LP records to compact discs, you'll soon enough be going through the same thing with your video collection. □

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FUTURE SHOCK

Continued from page 16

protagonist is an alien, Cameron says, he expects Sayles's flair for characterization and dialogue "to transform these alien creatures into sympathetic flesh-and-blood creatures."

Someone came to their senses, and changed the name of Wes Craven's new film, *Scary Movie*, to the considerably less goopy *Scream*. Drew Barrymore and Courtney Cox will be featured in the tale of a high school stalker, planned to mix horror and humor. On *Scream*'s completion, Craven will proceed to a mid-budget remake of Herk Harvey's no-budget classic, *Carnival of Souls*.

Richard Matheson's classic novel *I Am Legend*, concerning the last man alive after a plague of vampirism, has been adapted twice (*Last Man On Earth* and *The Omega Man*); George Romero has conceded that the book was the prime inspiration for *Night of the Living Dead*. Now Carlo Carlei, the director of *Fluke*, will lead development of a new remake for Warner Brothers. Carlei is expected to follow that with a film based on Marvel's blind superhero, *Daredevil*.

That other 3-D game sensation, *Descent*, may make it to the big screen. The game's publisher, Interplay, recently started a film division, telling the movie trades, "There's a lot more to this than making a movie out of *Descent*," but, frankly, who cares as long as *Descent* gets made.

Rob Liefeld has scored his fourth movie deal, signing with New Line for an adaptation of *Avengelyne*, the story of an angel with an attitude. Frankly, I'm getting a little tired of hearing about how Liefeld was handed another million; how about a moratorium until *The Mark*, *Dooms IV*, or *The Prophet* actually gets made?

David Goyer has just as many comics projects in the works, and has some real credits as well; read about 'em in this issue's *Crow 2* interview, including his collaboration with Alex Proyas (*The Crow*) on *Dark City*, which I hear is "Kafka as read by Bunuel," — if I were literate, I might know what that means. Proyas's second film for New Line will be a remake of *Quatermass and The Pit*, released in the United States as *50 Million Miles to Earth*. Professor Quatermass, in case you don't know, was the Fox Mulder of the '50s.

Paramount's title for the *Generations 2* movie is now *First Contact*. ABC's fall schedule includes one show of some interest to fans: *Sabrina*, the Teenage Witch, stars Melissa Joan Hart (of *Clarissa Explains It All*) as a young witch who tries to keep her powers secret.

There's more earth-shattering news about future projects scattered through this issue — Peter Jackson on *King Kong*, Dean Devlin chats about the American *Godzilla*, so anything I might say would be redundant — except perhaps to mention that Uma Thurman plays a genetically perfect person in Tristar's *The Eighth Day*. I call that typecasting. □

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MASTERS OF FANTASY:

James Cameron Makes It Happen

How one man gathered the tools and the people to help transfer his dreams onto film.

BY JOHN PLATT

WHETHER ROARING THROUGH THE clouds in a jet fighter, or diving to the sea-bottom in a mini-sub, he's the man to turn to when the assignment is too daunting for anyone else.

I'm not talking about *True Lies* secret agent Harry Tasker, but the man who created him, total filmmaker James Cameron. We caught up with Cameron recently at Digital Domain, his state-of-the-art effects facility where more than 300 top-notch technicians, artists, and production personnel were busily bringing ideas to life: Michael Jackson had just left the motion-capture room, where he'd been working on a Stan Winston-directed video; a physical effects team was mixing phosphorescent slime into cinematic lava for the upcoming volcano flick, *Dante's Peak*; the entire place was abuzz with last minute post-production chores for Universal Studio Florida's new \$60 million T2-3D attraction starring Arnold Schwarzenegger; and James Cameron was taking a break from the pre-production of his \$100 million-budgeted romance/disaster epic *Titanic*.

Amid all this costly activity, I just kept thinking, 'How on Earth



did the sci-fi dreams of one man bring all this into existence?"

It certainly didn't happen overnight. When asked about his very first film, Cameron laughed. "I think it started as a project for geography—it was called *Niagara*, or *How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Falls*... my first big opus..."

Unlike the directors he's most often compared to, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, Cameron never went to film school. "The best way to learn to be a filmmaker is to be a filmmaker, you know?" he told us. "Just pick up your dad's camera and make a film. Learn how to take different images and whack them together and then... watch them go."

Although he made films from an early age, the adult Cameron didn't immediately pursue filmmaking. For a time, he even considered becoming a scientist, but, "I realized that my calculus was just not quite fast enough," he recalls. "I'd always been an artist and interested in photography, so I drifted down another path. For about four or five years, I was a machinist and a truck driver, and thought I was going to be a novelist... just doing a lot of writing."



William Wisher, who met Cameron in high school and later helped write both *Terminator* films, fondly remembers his partner-to-be as "a teenage geek," but says, "I always knew he was gonna be successful. He was very talented and driven."

The young duo collaborated on a sci-fi short called *Xenogenesis*. "Jim designed all the models and made them from scratch. Jim had the ability to visualize something and then say, 'OK, it should work like this ...' And it always worked."

Xenogenesis worked as an audition reel, landing Cameron his first paying film job, building models for the low-budget king, Roger Corman. Former Corman producer Chuck Comisky (most recently producer of *T2-3D*) remembers hiring the young Cameron: "He brought over this little ten minute film and it was actually pretty remarkable. And, of course, my position was, if he wanted to work for the kind of money that I could pay, he had a job."

Comisky immediately realized he had more than just the average employee on his team: "If two things became apparent early on, they were that Jim was immensely talented — and that whoever I hap-

Opposite, Cameron on the set of Terminator 2 3-D: Battle Across Time with veteran fx wizards Stan Winston (far left) and John Bruno (right). The "multimedia adventure," which opened recently at Universal Studios, Florida, features what is estimated to be the most expensive film footage ever produced. The twelve-minute, \$23 million film reunited Arnold Schwarzenegger, Eddie Furlong (both above), Linda Hamilton and Robert Patrick.

pened to put on the crew with him better be able to keep up. Jim just doesn't have patience for what he considers ineptness."

Which brings up the subject of Cameron's much-debated on-set tirades. Stan Winston (Academy Award-winning special effects man behind the *Terminator*'s endoskeleton) adamantly defends Cameron: "I remember on the first *Terminator*, I had a blow-up with Jim Cameron. The next day, I had a box of cigars on my desk and a note of apology from Jim — and we had just started working together. So, for all of those people who want to say the negative about Jim, they just haven't worked with him on that level."

Winston adds: "Jim cares about the people who work around him, whether they know it or not. He wants the best — and is frustrated when he doesn't get the best. And I don't blame him."

During his two years in low-budget boot camp, Cameron learned



Cut from the original release of Cameron's *The Abyss*, this scene of impending destruction by a massive tidal wave has been restored to the "Director's Cut," version of the film.

much more than just the nuts-and-bolts of filmmaking: "The lessons from low-budget filmmaking are the life lessons of a filmmaker," Cameron says today. "You have to make it happen. Even when everything is against you, and it starts to rain in the

middle of a sunny day scene you have to make it happen ... there's no going back. So it teaches you a kind of discipline, and it gives you confidence, if you survive it."

Of course, Cameron didn't merely survive the low-budget realm, he thrived within it, eventually landing his first directing job, the ill-fated *Piranha 2: The Spawning*. Cameron explains that, due to "creative differences," he was asked to leave after a week-and-a-half of filming, "without pay, I might add ..." When Cameron returned from Rome, tired and broke after *Piranha 2*, he hooked-up with his old friend Bill Wisher and told him an idea for something he called *The Terminator*.

Wisher well remembers the day: "He told me the story. I gave him my two cents worth, and a few months later he came back with his treatment and said, 'Would you help me write some of the scenes based on this outline?' And I said, 'OK. Sure ...'

"It's funny. No one I've ever met, including Jim, said 'I think I'm gonna write something and change history with it.' But it turned out that is what happened."

The Terminator, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger — then a world-famed athlete, but still largely untried as a leading man — was made for under \$7 million, and grossed nearly \$100 million worldwide, and completely re-defined the sci-fi, horror, and action genres.

"I think part of the enduring power of *The Terminator* is that it is so simple and so easy to understand," Cameron told us, "It's kind of like a shark. It's streamlined and does what it does pretty well. And I think that was the power of it ..."

With *The Terminator's* success, Cameron was suddenly propelled to the top of Hollywood's 'A' list of hot directors, and was now in

the enviable position of being able to choose his next project. Though now it's hard to believe, many of his closest friends tried to steer Cameron away from doing the sequel to Ridley Scott's *Alien*.

Cameron explains: "Everybody who knew me said 'Don't do *Alien II* — it's career suicide, a no-win situation. If it's good, Ridley will get the credit, and if it's bad, you'll never work again.' And I went, 'But guys, I love it. I want to do this movie.' So it was this kind of childlike approach to it."

"On the other hand I was trying to be as smart as possible about it. I knew that I had to create my own stylistic territory, while being true to the first film. You have to constantly surprise the audience, but surprise is dangerous, because people can react against it. And that's the trick, finding the right kind of surprise that works."

"I think the big surprise was that you could do a film consistent with Ridley's picture, that was also a real roller coaster ride ... more of an adventure movie than a Gothic suspense horror film."

Despite his doomsayers, Cameron's *Aliens* became one of the most successful films of 1986. Offers poured in, but Cameron had his heart set on next making the deep-sea, SF adventure *The Abyss*. Today, all those involved agree that film was the most difficult film ever made.

"On *The Abyss*, everybody had to be a diver," recalls effects supervisor John Bruno. "It was shot almost entirely in the water and we all were sick. We all had ear infections ... no one escaped that."

But, as Cameron explains, "I don't think we could have accomplished that film any other way than we did. I certainly don't think we made any major mistakes in judgment."

Still, with *The Abyss* running slightly over three hours, Cameron cut several scenes prior to its release, including what some say was a crucial tidal wave sequence. Consequently, the film took a pounding from critics and was a box-office disappointment. "It's interesting that people say, 'Well, you know, Jim Cameron couldn't have screwed up ... he must have been forced to cut the film.'" Cameron told us, "but in truth, to be fair to the studio, sure, there was pressure about the time — studios generally don't like long films. They want you to mesmerize an audience, but do it fast so we can turn over the shows,

Continued on page 68



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In *Phenomenon*, John Travolta takes a stretch from his usual "likeable hood" roles.

Reel Genius

BY TANYA ANN FLETCHER

According to director Jon Turteltaub, the best science fiction films are not the ones where you "blow up big things" but where sci-fi is used as a way of exploring "human frailties and society."

"I think the best science fiction movie of all time was *Planet of the Apes*," says Turteltaub, whose own career trajectory went skyward with the Disney comedy *Cool Runnings* and the sweet romantic comedy *While You Were Sleeping*. "You don't think of it primarily as a science fiction movie, because it used scientific elements to tell a morality tale."

Turteltaub thinks of *Phenomenon*, his own initial foray into fantastica, in the same way. "It's not as much a morality tale, but *Phenomenon* clearly has science fiction ideas to it without being a big shoot-'em-up, or having big monsters coming out of people's stomachs."

Phenomenon follows the travails of a simple man, George Mally (John Travolta), who gazes at the sky one night and is blinded by a mysterious white light of unknown origin. The next day he wakes up to his own radical transformation, as he slowly discovers the power of his own genius intellect.

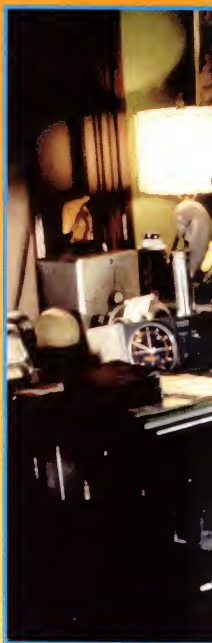
"The film is a journey of discovery as to why this happened," explains Turteltaub. "It's about what Mally does with this new ability, and how his new-found intelligence changes his life and, even more importantly, the lives of the people around him. It looks at how people distrust things that are new, and how people are afraid of things that they don't understand."

The film's first-rate cast also includes Robert Duvall as a doctor who serves as a father figure for Mally, Forest Whitaker as his best friend who

lives on a nearby farm, and Kyra Sedgwick plays the new girl in town that Mally slowly falls in love with.

"These people around George help ground the story," says screenwriter George DiPego. "And George himself is a very grounded guy. These people reacting to the story's unusual events help give the film a real line of reality."

"It illustrates how intelligence and wisdom bring compassion and spiritual understanding," the director says. "Too often in film it's only the stupid who are able to love, and the stupid people who see the truth. Or it's always a little child or a retarded boy who seem to have all the great depth and wisdom in human nature. The movie is just the opposite. It says the pursuit of greater knowledge and greater learning is what brings you compassion and a bit of enlightenment."



The search for the perfect actor to bring George Mally to life zeroed in on comeback kid John Travolta, who had a kinship with the role since it tied very much into his own spiritual beliefs with L. Ron Hubbard's *Dianetics*. John Travolta, now at a new crest in his career, was drawn to the Mally role in part because of the parallels he saw between Mally's experience and



his own involvement in the "mind-science" philosophy of the late SF writer and founder of Scientology. "John told me this was the first time he was offered a character that really fit him emotionally and philosophically," says DiPego, "and he felt George Mally was an opportunity for him to get his own philosophies and feelings into his work. He really wanted to get the character right, and thoroughly enjoyed playing it."

Turteltaub agrees that Travolta was "the obvious choice" for the role. "I couldn't imagine anyone else; the character has an everyman quality that I think John really personifies. He tapped into all those elements in the lead character. And he has such great comic timing that you just can't help but root for him."

Though Travolta usually plays pro-

tagonists, Turteltaub points out that, on closer examination, those roles usually carried dark shades of gray. "This role is a bit of a departure for him. John usually plays lovable villains. *Broken Arrow* was the first time he was clearly a villain, but if you look at his other characters, he's usually playing a likable jerk. In *Grease* and in *Saturday Night Fever*, he was a tough kid. In *Pulp Fiction*, he was a murderer, and in *Get Shorty* he was a loan shark. Travolta plays bad guys, but he's so damn likable you forget that. In this case, he actually gets to play a good guy for a change, and you add that to his normal charisma and the result is unbelievable."

DiPego (best known for such top-selling suspense novels as *Shadow of the Beast* and *With a Vengeance*) first conceived the project in his remote Northern California cabin. "I go up to

Sonoma to do my writing sometimes, or just to kick back," says the screenwriter. "It's a place where everything else recedes, and you're face to face with nature; the only sound you hear is the wind in the trees. You automatically have this connection with nature, and that led me to some parts of *Phenomenon* — when you see the film, you'll see where some of that was captured."

"The other aspect was the big 'What If.' I enjoy stories like that, and I thought, 'What if there was a man who was the smartest human being on the planet? What would he know and how would his intelligence impact him and the people around him?' So it

Continued on page 68

In Phenomenon, simple George Mally (John Travolta above, with Forest Whitaker) is mysteriously transformed into a genius with the powers of mind reading and telekinesis. Travolta left, with director Turteltaub and Duval and above, with Kyra Sedgwick.

The writer-producer of *StarGate* and *Independence Day*,
"the biggest low-budget films ever made."

DEAN DEVLIN and the Spirit of Independence

BY ED FLIXMAN

A FEW FILMS HAVE ENJOYED THE SORT OF advance word that surrounds Independence Day. Well before the explosive teaser-trailer hit the theaters in March, word was out that the filmmaking team of writer-director Roland Emmerich and writer-producer Dean Devlin were about to unleash an alien invasion film to go well beyond anything ever seen before—one of those rare SF films that everybody, but everybody, would feel obligated to see.

My own inclination to dismiss the hype surrounding Independence Day dissipated upon meeting Devlin, and witnessing the eight-minute preview reel that he unspooled for a gathering of New York press. Devlin joined his German partner's Centropolis Films company in 1992, as a co-writer on the Jean-Claude Van Damme vehicle, *Universal Soldier*—like much of Emmerich's early work, a visually intriguing film of relatively slight content. In the next five years, the team has





moved up from such "SF exploitation" to their present status as Hollywood kingpins.

In a city teeming with film talent, such a leap is extremely difficult, save for the occasional lucky lightning-strike. But Devlin's charm, his boundless energy, and his unflagging enthusiasm for every facet of his work, suggest that luck had very little to do with this team's ascendancy. We later got the

chance to quiz Devlin about the secrets of Centropolis's success, and about the past, present, and future projects of this vital new force in SF media.

Sci-Fi Entertainment: How is the film coming along?

Dean Devlin: So far, we're doing OK. All the elements are finally done—6,000 different elements to make 400 visual effects shots, 10 to 15 elements for the average shot. One particular shot has 40 elements to be combined. For perspective, *StarGate* had an average of three elements per shot.

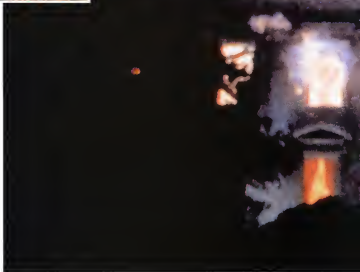
But it's all in the can, and being loaded into

Above, proving once and for all that "we're not alone," an alien ship parks over Manhattan.

Left, Steven Hiller (Will Smith) and David Levinson (Jeff Goldblum) set in motion their desperate plan to either survive or "go down in flames."



Right, one scene sure to be a crowd-pleaser during this election year. Above, having escaped the destruction of the White House, U.S. President Thomas Whitmore (Bill Pullman), confers with Press Secretary Constance Spano (Margaret Colin) and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Grey (Robert Loggia) about meeting the alien enemy face-to-face. Far right, the aliens' powerful weaponry can turn cities into rubble.



the machines. A little behind schedule, because we recently added more machines, and took some time to get those up and running, but that will help us to catch up. The best news is, the quality is excellent, and we intend to keep it that way. If it means I have to hand the film to the projectionist and say 'Watch it — that's still wet,' so be it.

SFE: I've been writing about films for twenty years now, and I've never before encountered a film that had so many people convinced that it was a "sure thing."

Devlin: I know, I *hate* that. Talk about pressure! Our past films were all supposed to be bombs; they ended up as hit movies. That was easy for us, because we were the underdogs; anything we accomplished was going to be a surprise. Now, if this film is anything short of a gigantic runaway blockbuster, somehow it's a failure, even if it's financially successful.

So there's incredible pressure, but people's enthusiasm for the film is also a lot of fun for us. What's great is that people are 'getting it.' Previously, the task was trying to convince people of what we did, and trying to get them to come and see it. I can't tell you how many times I hear from people who didn't see *StarGate* until a year after its release, when it came to cable, saying 'Hey, I had no idea I was going to like it.'

SFE: As wonderful as this cast is, there's a notable absence of "box office insurance" type stars, except perhaps Will Smith...

Devlin: And we signed Will Smith well before *Bad Boys* came out. We had seen him in *Six Degrees of Separation*, and realized that he was an amazing actor; he was signed solely for his skill.

SFE: Usually, with a film at this budget level, there's studio pressure to sign names, rather than actors.

Devlin: True, but one of the reasons we signed for this picture with Fox was that they have a history with this kind of film. They're aware that, when *Star Wars* came out, no one knew who any of the actors were; they knew that, when *Alien* was made, no one in the

audience would guess that Sigourney Weaver would be the one to remain alive at the end of the picture. When you put a major star in a film like this, everybody immediately has a good idea of who is going to live or die.

We modeled this picture on the disaster film genre, and the great thing about the disaster films is that you *can* kill off lead characters; people forget that at the end of *Poseidon Adventure*, Gene Hackman dies — and Shelley Winters dies in the scene just before that. It gives you the opportunity to make a rewarding, blockbuster, 'popcorn movie,' and yet take away some of the predictability those films tend to have. We're following twelve different characters, and you won't know who's going to survive. It makes it a lot more fun to watch.

When we came to Fox, the very first thing we said to them is that this is a movie where the movie has to be the event.

SFE: As a child in the '50s, I had recurring dreams about aliens arriving in city-sized ships; later, when I saw the saucer films of those times, they were always a letdown. I was amazed at the preview reel, because you matched the scope of my nightmares, and the feeling of dread they created.

Devlin: What's funny is that, when we started this film, I actually didn't want to do it; I totally resisted it, for almost a month and a half. Roland kept trying to talk me into it. Finally I said to him, 'A bunch of UFOs flying around — *how* many times have we seen that?' He said to me, 'We never saw it right. Think of the spaceships you've



seen in the movies before ... now, look out the window.' So I did. Then he said, 'Imagine that you couldn't see the sky. As far as your eye can see, for 15 miles, you just see the underbelly of a spaceship.' I went, 'Uh ... I get it.'

In our first week of writing the script, he said to me, 'Dean, if you could travel 9 billion light-years to another planet, would you attach yourself to someone's back? Or create little pods to infiltrate the human race?' Well of course the answer is no — if you're able to accomplish that, you don't need to sneak-attack.

SFE: We're dandruff on their shoulder.

Devlin: Exactly. That's why we don't treat the alien invasion as a war, or as evil, bad-guy aliens, but more as a force of nature. That's where the film's disaster-movie approach comes from. This is not someone you can negotiate with, not someone that you can battle. This is the end of the world. What are you going to do? That makes it much more about the human spirit — and so the title, *Independence Day*.

SFE: Yet toward the end, the characters played by Smith and Jeff Goldblum put a plan into motion; isn't that a combat plan?

Devlin: That raises the question: If you *know* you're going to die anyway, do you just lay there and take it? Or do you go out with style? That's what the whole ending sequence is about — that it's better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.

SFE: With both this film and *StarGate*, you and Roland have established a very strong reputation for economy.



Devlin: Yes, and that's very important to us. Right now, the trend is that every 'event' film has to cost a hundred million. That's not just unfortunate, it's dangerous; it puts a tremendous amount of pressure on filmmakers to make "commercial" movies, which takes a filmmaker's considerations entirely away from where they should be. It's bad for the studios as well, because they have too much riding on one show, and it makes *terrible* problems for people who are trying to make smaller, more interesting films, because all the money is getting eaten up by fewer and fewer films.

So we take a lot of pride in our reputation for economy. We say that we can put a film on screen that will stand side-by-side with a film costing twice the amount, and we will have more on screen. That's the goal.

When we went to do *StarGate*, every studio in town said it was



Above, a military base is the site of a humiliating defeat of Earth forces under the onslaught of the technically advantaged alien enemy. Right, military grunts flee in panic as the aliens decimate Earth's last line of defense. Below right, Marine Captain Steve Hiller and friend and fellow pilot Jimmy (Harry Connick, Jr.) scramble for their fighter craft.



\$100 to 150 million to do that script. We made that film for under \$60 million — and we didn't shrink the script, we enlarged it. Here, we wrote a movie at least three times bigger than *StarGate* had been, and we said, 'We think we can do it for roughly the same amount of money.' It was a little bit more, but not much.

SFE: But can't a reputation for economy also be a problem?

Devlin: It can, but it hasn't for us, yet. We've discovered that our approach creates an atmosphere that is much more like a student film; we refer to each of our films as 'the biggest low-budget film in history.' And you get that attitude out to your people. For technical credits, for instance, we don't go to the top "names" in the business; instead we take the very talented people that we meet, and give them a job that they've never had before.

On this film, which is likely to be regarded as one of the top state-of-the-art effects films in several years, we have two visual effects supervisors, neither of whom have carried that particular title before. Both have been in the business for years — but we gave them their shot at running the show. Our production designers, same thing — and wait until you see it. We blow away the sets of *StarGate*.

It all comes down to creativity, which Roland and I both value tremendously. When I first worked with Roland, I was an actor, hired to be in a movie [*Moon 44*] in Germany that Roland was directing. The production ran out of money — literally ran out of funds — just before the last scene was shot. The script said that this last scene had to take place in a futuristic prison, forty stories high, with hundreds of prisoners. Roland started chasing around his office, grabbed a pencil, made a little drawing, and gave it to his assistant along with \$3,000, money that he had in his pocket, saying he needed mirrors, specified the size of them, and 45 wooden dowels, 15 feet high. He made two rows of dowels, and put the mirrors on the floor and on the ceiling, and got everybody on the crew to put their hands through the bars. Lit properly, it looked just like a prison, forty stories high.

I said to myself, that's filmmaking. It's not about throwing money around. The traditional role of special effects has been to save money, doing things that you couldn't do for financial or practical reasons. What we've found is that, by trying to keep the budget down, it inspires people to become creative that way.

SFE: Did the "disaster film" storyline — following different char-

acters and several storylines, arcing through the same events — complicate production?

Devlin: Actually, no. The only thing is that, with over 140 speaking roles, you create a casting and paperwork nightmare. But it made shooting easier, because it was easier to manipulate schedules; you can't shoot this guy on a given day, it's very easy to change plans, and shoot one of the other storylines, with a different character. We were able to shoot this film, three times bigger than *StarGate*, in 72 days. *StarGate* was 86 days, while *Universal Soldier* was 78 days — this was our biggest film, and our shortest shooting schedule.

SFE: That's something to be proud of.

Devlin: Well, I think it shows that we've learned from experience. It also has a lot to do with our cast. Whenever you make a film, it seems you always wind up with two or three real jerks in the cast, but on this film, we did not have one ego to deal with. We weren't really expecting that, and it just makes things go so fast and so smooth. But I think when you take the attitude that you're going to work with actors, rather than stars, choosing people on the quality of their work, that does tend to happen.

When we first cast Kurt Russell, James Spader, and Jaye Davison for *StarGate*, people thought that we were nuts — James Spader in this kind of movie? Kurt Russell for \$7 million? Are you out of your minds? We hadn't even met with Jaye Davison, but he'd just been nominated for an Oscar.

SFE: I was told that Jaye Davison was an absolute monster on the *StarGate* set.

Devlin: No comment. [laughs]



SFE: But that casting worked out well; it wouldn't be *StarGate* without him.

Devlin: It did, it worked out very well for us, and the end result was a very unique villain — a villain that could *only* have happened by accident.

SFE: It's generally regarded that a film belongs to a director more than to a producer or writer, if only because the director has to live with a film longer. How does that work out between you and Roland?

Devlin: There's no question about it, Roland is the driving force, the creative energy. He is the guy — my teacher, my best friend, and my guru. But the thing about Roland that is so wonderful is that he has no ego, which is unheard of in Hollywood. In my working relationship with him, he allows me to be a full partner, and very often we'll split duties. During the shoot, I was the second unit director, and sometimes when he felt that he wouldn't get to a scene for a time, he'd say, "Dean why don't you shoot that scene second unit?" I'm involved in the editing, casting, all the things that you don't expect a producer or writer to become involved in.

I can't imagine another director in the world giving a producer or writer the leeway that Roland allows. And that's because Roland's only concern is about the movie being excellent. It doesn't matter if an idea comes from a grip or the head of a studio — it's all about the product. That's why we're able to keep such a happy set, with great attitude, and we're able to get a tremendous amount of work done in a very brief amount of time.

SFE: As a former actor, what is it like working with actors as a producer?



Devlin: I don't consider myself a former actor — more like a *reformed* actor. I was a terrible student who had not done what he needed to do, and I only looked at acting as a means to get into producing or writing. You've never met anyone as glad to have given up a profession as I was.

Both Roland and I find a lot of "sympathy pains" in the casting process; we find that we get more nervous than the actors do. But, since we know about the other end of it, we have fun by running it as much as possible in the way that I always felt casting sessions should be run. We try to show a little more respect to the actors; for



instance, we always make sure that we have someone there who can actually act, to read with the actors, instead of just a casting director reading a script.

SFE: The most surprising casting here is Bill Pullman as the U.S. President. I love Pullman, but I wouldn't see him as presidential.

Devlin: My feeling at the beginning was, he's an excellent actor, he'll pull it off. At the same time, my gut kept telling me 'But I've never seen him do anything like this.' But Bill provided the proof that, if you go with talent, you'll always be rewarded. He is one of the huge surprises in this movie; he puts more testosterone into his character than into anything you've ever seen him do before. It's a great surprise, and I doubt that anyone will think of Bill Pullman in quite the same way again after they see this movie. I think he's going to be a major star after this film — and we're already planning to do another picture together.

SFE: Science fiction?

Devlin: Not SF. It's called *Supertanker*; that's all I can say just now.

SFE: Some of the promotion for the film — particularly the gathering of UFO experts along with the movie's cast near Area 51 — seems very X-Files-ish, which seems a little strange for this kind of action film.

Devlin: A few months ago, I was starting to feel that there was just

too much happening too soon for the promotion of this film. Then we had a meeting at Fox, where I discovered that most of it was not coming from our end, but was being generated by people who had adopted our film as a focal point. We've tapped into something that people want to see, and they're reaching more toward us than we toward them. It was a case of either pulling the brakes, or letting it go — so why not have some fun, and go with it?

Since *Close Encounters*, there hasn't been a major film to treat this subject with a serious eye; so if the UFO fanatics are interested, and they're running around, why not go with it?

SFE: A friend of mine, who is a UFO enthusiast, suggested that I ask you about the military's involvement with this film.

Devlin: The script portrays the military in a very favorable light, so we felt that it was very likely that they'd work with us — let us get on some army bases, get easier access to F-18s, and so on. When they first read the script, they said there were several technical problems with the script, involving chain-of-command, who was in charge of what, and so on. They were really helpful, they worked with us for several weeks.

We corrected all that, improving tremendously the technical accuracy of the script. Then we said, will you work with us? They said, 'Well there's one last thing; we'd like there not to be any reference



Left, discovered years ago at a mysterious crash site, a captured alien fighter may be Earth's last thin hope for survival. Above, Dr. Okun (Brent Spiner, right), heading the team of scientists investigating the strange craft, is aroused by our momentous contact with alien life, but Cabinet Secretary Nemziki (James Rebhorn) is less thrilled.

to Area 51 in the movie.' We told them we wanted to tap into the pre-existing UFO mythology, we had to deal with that. They said, 'Can't you just say secret base?' We said no — and that's how we lost military support for the film.

SFE: So, does that make you think?

Devlin: Well, it'd be great PR to say 'Ah! That's the proof they're hiding something.' Recently *60 Minutes* did a piece called 'Area 51: Catch 22,' and they theorized that the military can't acknowledge the existence of Area 51 because of the current lawsuit [by former civilian workers claiming damages from toxic chemicals at the "officially secret" aircraft test site] — their theory is that if the government acknowledges Area 51's existence, they can be found liable. And that may be it, but I think the *actual* reason is that they're so tired of being bothered by UFO activists that they just didn't want to contribute to it any further.

SFE: This will reach our readers just days before the film is released in the United States, when presumably everyone in the world will go see it. When it opens, is there any one specific thing that you hope will make people sit up and take notice?

Devlin: There is, though I can't really tell you about it — a sequence in the middle of the film, about five or six minutes, that I personally think will be considered a classic, along the lines of the chariot race in

Ben Hur, the nuclear explosion in *Terminator 2*, or the train wreck in *The Fugitive*. After the movie comes out, I'd love to sit with a bunch of film students discussing that one sequence — it floored both Roland and me when we first saw it, we just couldn't believe how well it came off.

SFE: I understand that the next thing coming out from Centropolis is going to be a 3-D action computer game, developed with Bethesda software, rather than a film. How is *The Tenth Planet* coming along?

Devlin: It's coming along excellently, it should be ready for release by the end of this year, or early next year. Oliver Schull, who has worked with us as a concept designer since *Universal Soldier*, and is a production designer on *ID4*, designed all the spaceships, really excellent-looking ships, up to the quality of our feature films.

The game is built upon what they call the X-engine, which drives the three-dimensional, interactive aspect of the game. They previously used the same engine for their game *Terminator: Future Shock*, a game I'm just in love with; and they learned a lot about the X-engine in developing that one, so on this they'll be able to stretch the engine's abilities by quite a bit. What's also very interesting is that we've struck a deal with Trendmaster for a line of *Tenth Planet* toys.

This is not a huge moneymaking thing for us. The reason we're doing it is the opportunity to tell a science fiction story in an entirely different arena. We're very ambitious that way; we feel that science fiction has been a neglected arena — since *StarGate*, it's been looking a bit better, but when we were going around with that script, the accepted wisdom was 'Science fiction? That's dead, except for *Star Trek*.'

But we also want to be involved more in publishing, we've been involved with the series of *StarGate* novels, we're going to be doing some original novels, we'd like to eventually have television and music divisions. But all of that will be developed slowly and care-

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*"I thought that Eric was the last, I never imagined
there would be another ..."*

THE CROW

city of angels

BY MELISSA J. PERENSON

VENGANCE IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE IS perhaps the only vengeance that's righteous. For the unrestful soul, barbarism must be countered, and personal justice exacted on the perpetrator of the horrific crime. So continues *The Crow*, the dark anthology of a mysterious bird with the power to resurrect victims of savage violence, giving them a chance at eternal rest. The sequel to Alex Proyas's low-budget film, the surprise hit of 1994, *The Crow: City of Angels* reinvents the gritty urban gothic, with a brand-new, though slightly familiar, saga.

Vincent Perez: ANGELS in America



BEING AN ACTOR IS LIKE surfing on waves, you know?" says French actor Vincent Perez, his voice rising above the din of traffic outside his Greenwich Village apartment in Manhattan. "You have to catch the right wave, and after that you have to wait for the next one. Today the wave is based in America, and tomorrow, I don't know."

The wave Perez, 32, speaks of is the back-to-back opening of his first English-speaking roles in American films, *City of Angels* and, later this year, *Talk of Angels*, a love story set against the tumult of the Spanish Civil War. Perez is already well-established on the international film scene, with such films as the Oscar-winning *Indochine*, and *Cyrano de Bergerac* to his credit. Now, the lead role of Ashe, who rises to avenge the brutal double-murder of himself and his 10-year-old son, will provide American audiences with a spectacular introduction to Perez and his talents.

The wave was first approached for *The Crow* after the producers saw *La Reine Margot* (*Queen Margot*), 1994 winner of the Palme d'or at Cannes. "Suddenly, I was getting several offers in America," recalls Perez, "and

one was for *The Crow*. I met Tim Pope, the director, and I discovered that this guy had a vision. I really liked the subject and the themes and everything, but I wasn't crazy with the idea of doing a sequel; but I read the script and I liked it. For me, the part was sort of between Hamlet and Jim Morrison. And they liked that idea, so we started to work together and talk about the journey of the character, and we found we were talking the same language. It was great."

Perez is fully aware of *The Crow's* legacy.

"But we're talking about movies," he insists. "I don't believe that movies are carrying bad karma. My only apprehension about the role was I don't want to do the same movie again. But it is another movie; it's another actor, another part, another director, another writer." Perez pauses uncomfortably, then continues: "For me, it's very difficult to talk about the first one because of what happened. I can't say anything bad about the movie, but I do think that the script wasn't as deep as the one we did, because there is a real journey — the character at the beginning of the story is different from the one you have at the end of the story. He's changing through the story, and that's what I like in characters. In the first one, Brandon Lee did an amazing job, and the tragic end of the shooting was very terrible. But we knew this, so we really were not trying to do a second *Crow*, only another *Crow*."

At the start of filming, Perez says, "I felt I was choosing my own mask. I know that Brandon Lee went through the same kind of fog, like when I was preparing my part. I would sometimes say to myself, 'Oh, I'm sure he thought about this.' So it's very strange —" he pauses again "— especially at the beginning of the shoot, I think I was really quite close to him, without knowing it. Afterward, I went into my own journey, and I did my own part, which is quite different from the first one."

Prior to filming, according to Perez, there was an unusual degree of interaction between cast, director, and screenwriter. Pope was open to doing rehearsals prior to shooting, says Perez, "so we prepared all the themes and we thought about it, and we changed a few dialogues with David Goyer. It was great because everybody was working together, and it was like a big family; I loved working like that. The movie is about rituals, death, religion, and love. So you have all the major themes that you need."

Exhilarating though it was, *The Crow* shoot was not without incident. "One day, we were shooting downtown. It was like four or five in the morning, and they had closed a bridge for us, and put some barriers up so the cars couldn't go through the set," remembers Perez. "The crew was on one side with a camera and I was on the other side while we were rehearsing. Suddenly we heard this big bam coming from the barrier, and it was one car following another, shooting with guns. And they passed right by the camera and me. That was like reality goes through fiction."

Having worked mainly on European productions, it didn't take Perez long to notice the differences between American and European cinema. "Producers are more powerful in America than in Europe. In Europe, the director is the one who has the final cut." Another key difference lies in the genre of films being done on each continent. Since doing *Queen Margot* and *Indochine*, Perez has been receiving more offers for films here in the United States. "For the moment, I have to say I think perhaps there are much better scripts for me in America than in France," admits Perez. "There are more choices, more movies made here. In America, there are more commercial ideas, there's more thinking about an audience, more organization. And they're open to foreign writers, directors, actors, ready to embrace other cultures."

Born in Lausanne, Switzerland to a German mother and a Spanish father, Perez grew up in Geneva. He first became interested in acting as a child, when, he says, "I was a little bit bored. I realized I would have just this one life. And when I was watching TV or movies, I thought, 'Oh my God, all those actors, they have more than one life.' That was my first attraction to the movie business." Well, that and Charlie Chaplin, whom Perez speaks about in a reverent tone. "My entire vision of the movie business was influenced by Charlie Chaplin. He was a genius." At 19, Perez moved to Paris to continue his acting studies, and became a student at the Paris Conservatoire, and then to Nanterre to participate in l'Ecole d'Amandiers, an experimental school under the auspices of Patrice Chereau, who also directed *Queen Margot*. After about seven years of training, Perez began with theatrical roles, and then landed several film opportunities before his vault into Euro-celebrity.

Perez made a successful foray to the other side of the camera, directing an award-winning short in 1992, and he's been working on a script for the past four years, which he hopes to shop to producers in the next year. But he's unlikely to abandon acting, which Perez says, "is great, because I can be mean, I can be tough, I can hurt people, I can manipulate people — I love it!" □



Of course, it helps when the person breathing life into the saga is familiar with the terrain. In this respect, the producers of *City of Angels* couldn't have made a better choice than lifelong comics fan David S. Goyer. Shortly after receiving his screenwriting

with the medium that it's not like I have to be brought up to speed on it. I mean, I'd already read the *Crow* comic. I honestly think it was just shrewd thinking on [producer Edward] Pressman's part. They wanted to find somebody who was appropriate for the task.

You're going to pick someone with a fairly dark sensibility who's conversant in the comic book medium."

Goyer was approached for *City of Angels* in January 1995. "I had written a script called *Blade*, which is based on a Marvel Comics' character; that's what they had read that lead them to want to work with me. They came back a couple of times, and I said the only way I would do it is if we could tell the story of a new character."

The tragic death of the first film's star, Brandon Lee, contributed to Goyer's hesitation. "It seemed kind of creepy making a sequel, given that Brandon had died. My first response was, 'What could they possibly do? Is it just a money bid to capitalize on the first film?'"

"But then I thought, well, maybe there is an interesting story to tell. I started thinking, 'What if we told the story of Sarah as an adult?' That's what made me go for it." There was considerable give-and-take at the outset, as Goyer sought to create a story worth telling, in opposition to pressure from Mira-

Previous spread: Vincent Perez is Ashe Corvin, the Crow. Above, Ashe confronts Spider Monkey (Vincent Castellanos). Left, Mia Sara plays Sarah, the girl with a thing for crows. Opposite page, Tim Pope (right) observes a playback with Vincent Perez.



degree from U.S.C. in 1988, Goyer was applying his comic-book sensibilities to such martial arts epics as *Death Warrant* and *Kickboxer 2*; a key aspect of Goyer's current career is the trusting relationship he now holds with Marvel Comics' Stan Lee, who has entrusted the film development of about a half-dozen different Marvel characters to Goyer's hands, several of these now in the works at Fox television.

"I know the comic book industry quite well; I've got thousands of comics myself," Goyer boasts. "In general, I'm so familiar

max, the film's distributor, to carbon-copy the successful original. "The movie that we made isn't precisely the movie that I wanted to make at the beginning," Goyer admits. "I wanted to have a female Crow in the second film, and I wanted it to be Sarah—I thought that would be a most interesting kind of twist, to have a female Crow. And no one could make any comparisons to Brandon Lee if the character was female. My second idea was to do a 'Gaslight Crow,' a movie that took place in Victorian England, where I was going to pit the Victorian Crow up against Jack the Ripper."

"I really wanted to do something completely different, but it was a major battle with Miramax. They were bent on making this film similar to the first. We ended up with a compromise, somewhere in-between. If I'd had my druthers, it would have been a female Crow all the way down the line. It turns out that I later heard that James O'Barr had wanted to do something similar—to have a female Crow if the sequel was made. I don't know... if they do a third one, maybe they could do that."

Another debate centered around the motivation of Ashe, the new film's hero, whose bid for vengeance is based upon the death of his young son. "A lot of people really wanted it to be a woman again. I felt that was just too much like the first film. I think that's insulting to the fans."

"I countered, 'Well, what's going to happen — every time the Crow comes back, his girl happens to die?' I thought that the only thing that could conceivably be stronger than a bond between a man and a woman might perhaps be a bond between a parent and their child."

Goyer consulted with the Crow's comic book creator, James O'Barr, on several occasions. "[O'Barr] was supposed to write a treatment, which he didn't finish; I think he said that he was too close to it, that he just couldn't do it. He was somewhat apprehensive about making a sequel, which is understandable, given that he was fairly close with

her everywhere; finally she comes to realize that Ashe is the person who's going to become the next avatar of the Crow, and that the Crow wants her to help this person make the transition, to explain to him why he's been brought back and to help him complete his mission of vengeance. In the course of the movie, they fall for one another, although it's a doomed love."

Though a simple encapsulation of the film's plot remains strongly reminiscent of the initial outing, Goyer expects to shake audiences up with the sequel. "There are a few surprises that happen in the third act," he hints. "I don't think the movie ends, even remotely, in the way the audience going in might think."

Despite the early wrangling over plot, Goyer feels that the film's status as an independent film allowed an unprecedented degree of freedom for the filmmakers. "I can't imagine this film, or even the first film,



Brandon Lee. But I met with him a few times, and he gave some input in terms of what I was doing. I think at the end he thought what we were doing had some integrity, so that's good."

The basic premise behind *The Crow*, explains Goyer, is that "when a terrible wrong has happened, when a soul can't rest, the bird brings that soul back to Earth in order to put things right, so that the soul can rest." In *City of Angels*, "the two main characters are Ashe [played by Vincent Perez] and Sarah [Mia Kirshner of *Exotica*], the girl from the first film. It's about eight or nine years later, and she's moved to the City of Angels, which is our version of Los Angeles. She's tried to put the past behind her, but she can't; she has recurring dreams of a man and his young son being murdered, and their bodies being dumped into the water."

"At the same time, the Crow is following

being made as a studio film. Studios are really bad at developing things, and particularly bad at developing things that are 'edgy.' Ed Pressman, as a producer, has a tradition of pushing the envelope. What Ed tends to do is pick the people that he likes, and then just let them run. Once he backs you, he will back you. And he'll stand behind your creative choices. Even when Tim and I might have been at odds with Miramax, Ed always backed us, which was great; few 'studio weasels' would ever do that."

Goyer, who was involved in the tumultuous development process of Robert A. Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters* at Disney, now feels that independent film "is the only way to go, for my money. I'd make all of my movies independently, if I could. Independent films don't usually have quite as much money as standard studio films, but the trade-off in the end is you get more creative freedom, which I think



that almost any filmmaker would go for."

Because job categories are so much looser on independent films, Goyer was able to



enjoy a fuller collaborative role on *City of Angels*. "I worked very closely with production designer Alex McDowell; he'd show me what he was working on, I'd comment, and sometimes he'd incorporate that into his work, or vice versa. Also, director Tim Pope, Alex, and myself scouted the locations, choosing the locations before I even wrote the script, which was an unusual way to work, but was great; I was able to craft my scenes directly to the chosen locations. That way, we cut out a lot of back and forth. Having seen the locations, we were able

to come up with ideas on the spot, and that influenced the way that I wrote it.

"A whole sequence, probably my favorite

sequence in the movie, came up because we just happened to see this really cool tunnel that led into the L.A. River. It was such an incredible location that we all looked at each other and said, 'We have to use this.' It's a really powerful sequence, too, that I don't think ever would have happened the other way."

Goyer also prepared for the shoot with a certain amount of online research, through his America Online account. "I was curious, when I was approached to do *The Crow*, as to what kind of fan base was out there," recalls Goyer, "I started looking around, and found that there were quite a few boards dedicated to Brandon Lee and *The Crow*. I started reading what people were saying, and after a certain point I introduced myself, which opened up a deluge of E-mail. Some people were fascinated, and couldn't ask me enough questions about what the movie would be like;

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Opposite, Ashe unleashes his outrage in the climactic sequence, set amid a raucous celebration of the Day of the Dead. Above, Ashe descends to the streets in pursuit of his intended prey. Below left, the street thugs who enforce the rule of druglord Judah Earl: Nemo (Thomas Jane, far right), Kali (Thuy Trang), Curve (Iggy Pop), and Spider Monkey.

Be Afraid

EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, A FILMMAKER emerges from the ranks of "exploitation filmmaking" to be heralded as a True Artiste. At that point, the critics that once did their best to destroy the Artiste's career will undertake a reappraisal, suddenly finding a subtle morality in David Cronenberg's primitive early works, or biting social critique in Jonathan Demme's women-in-prison films. Stuff that, somehow, wasn't there when the films were first released.

Such revisionist critics will twist themselves into pretzels trying to resolve the early excesses of Peter Jackson; the New Zealander first came to international attention at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival with the ultra-low-budget, sci-fi comedy *Bad Taste*—a film that lived up to its title, with a tale of a four-man hit squad pitted against an army of alien creatures with disgusting personal habits. In 1989, Jackson outdid himself with a puppet

show; *Meet The Feebles* was an obscenely funny "backstage musical" concerning a *Muppets*-like television variety show—and the disgusting personal habits of its felt-covered stars. Similarly, *Braindead* (also known as *Dead Alive*), which mixed a sweet love story with the tale of a rat from Skull Island whose bite starts an epidemic of cannibal zombies, first reached non-Kiwis through illicit video dubs and scattered midnight screenings.

By this time, Jackson had accumulated an army of hardened

*Peter Jackson brings
The Frighteners to town.*

BY LISA STONE MACCARILLO





Frank Bannister (foreground), Cyrus (Chi McBride, right), and Stuart (Jim Fyfe); a scamming ghostbuster and his insubstantial friends face true evil in The Frighteners.



Opposite top, John Astin is the Judge, another of Bannister's ghostly buddies. Opposite below, Lucy Lynskay (Trini Alvarado) is the attractive widow of one of Bannister's deceased cohorts. Above, G-man Milton Dammers (Jeffrey Combs, left) and Bannister in a moment of peril.

fans, unlikely to be shocked by anything. But he managed to deliver his biggest shock with last year's *Heavenly Creatures*, a passionate and lyrical glimpse at the inner lives of two teenaged girls. Umm ... did I mention that the little girls were mommy-murderers? At any rate, that film vindicated the loyalty of Jackson's longtime fans, won over the critics, and received Hollywood's stamp of approval: an Oscar nomination for best screenplay.

Now, Jackson is about to break new ground with his first big studio movie, Universal's *The Frighteners*, a paranormal thriller again combining horror and comedy; in Jackson's words, "a slightly weird hybrid thing. Set for release on July 19 in the United States and soon thereafter in the United Kingdom, the film features Michael J. Fox as Frank Bannister, a man whose business is ridding the citizens of small-

town Fairwater, California, of pesky spectral hauntings.

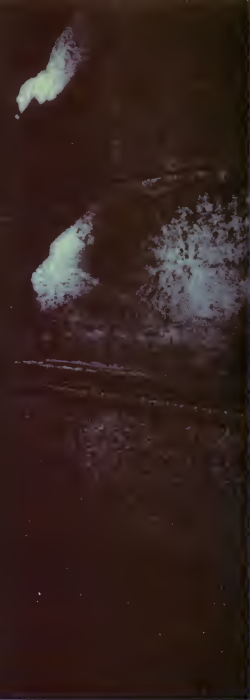
"He is a sort of oddball character who hangs around funerals and offers to use his services to contact spirits of the departed," explains Jackson. "The first twist is that we go home with this guy, and discover that he actually lives with three or four ghosts. So, the first twist is that the guy is not really a con man, because he *can* actually see ghosts. He is like their buddy, a guy whose friends are all dead. The second twist is that he actually is a con man because he uses his ghost buddies to go to other people's houses and scare them so that he gets more work.

"As we developed the film, we thought—'Well, what would happen if this guy who can see spirits and who can see into the other side, actually sees Death arrive one day?' He actually sees this figure of Death start to prey

on this town and he has to try to stop this spectral figure from killing people."

Jackson and his writing partner Frances Walsh (with whom he collaborated on *Heavenly Creatures* and *Braindead*) dreamed up *Frighteners* as a screenplay-only project, to be directed by other hands. "We came up with the basic seed of *The Frighteners* story while we were walking to the shops one day to buy some milk," he says. "You remember these things when they happen; they stick in your mind. We wrote it up as just a two-page story outline, which we sent to our agent in L.A."

The outline ultimately caught the attention of director Robert Zemeckis, and the project was set in motion. "We met up with Bob in L.A. in early 1993," Jackson remembers. "He wanted us to write the script, possibly for a *Tales from the Crypt*. It wasn't really clear at that point, and we said, 'Sure, we'd obviously love



to write the script.' We were just about to get into *Heavenly Creatures*, so we said it might take a while, but he said that was OK because he was about to do *Forrest Gump* at the time.

"So, it was about a year later, in early 1994, that we actually gave him the script. We had written it while we were cutting *Heavenly Creatures*. He liked it, and at that point he said, 'Well, are you interested in doing the film?'"

"It was strange, because we had written the script, never thinking that we were going to make the film. We thought that he was going to direct it, or he was going to get another director to do it. It wasn't clear that we were writing it for us—but you always fall in love with things that you've spent three or four months writing."

Jackson was immediately enthusiastic about the project, but it meant looking at the script in an entirely new way. One of the

early hurdles, in addition to fine-tuning the script to Jackson's directorial style, was casting, which he usually starts during the writing process. "When you're writing a script you tend to think of actors to play the different parts. It helps you develop the characters, but in this script we had free rein. We just wrote the characters as wild and crazy, doing what we wanted them to do. That became a problem that we created for ourselves; we wrote the script not knowing that we were going to make the movie, so we deliberately avoided assigning actors, even in our minds, to different characters, because we thought that, ultimately, we weren't going to be the people to decide these things."

Michael J. Fox, whose charisma and comic timing were a chief asset of Zemeckis's *Back to the Future* series, has recently opted for such dark material as *Blue in the Face* and *Cold*

Blooded, and his recent scene-stealing turn in *The American President*. "When we sat down to analyze what our main character was, and how we'd written it," Jackson says, "we wanted someone who could do dramatic roles very well, but also had a strong comic sense and good comic timing. So, we thought about Michael, not in the sense of the way that we're used to seeing him; we thought of the fact that he has also played roles that are more dramatic than he normally plays in his most recent films, and he's obviously very good at drama. Then we'd be able to use his comic abilities in the areas that we needed it. There are not that many actors who can cross over so easily."

Zemeckis made the call and, soon after, Fox was cast as the neurotic clairvoyant. Trini Alvarado, who played the angelic Meg in the recent production of *Little Women*, was cast as Lucy Lynskey, whose departed husband Ray



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Left, Lucy with Patricia Bradley (Dee Wallace-Stone), who still feels the pain of a youthful, and unwise (very unwise), love affair. Right, the Judge blows a gasket, in that inimitable Astin style.

(Peter Dobson) becomes one of Frank's spectral hang-arounds. From there, Jackson assembled an eclectic supporting cast, including genre favorites Jeffrey Combs (*Re-Animator*) as a G-man who suspects Frank of being the serial killer preying on Fairwater, and Dee Wallace Stone (*E.T.*, *The Howling*). Frank's ghost friends are played by former "Gomez Addams" John Astin as Judge, Chai McBride as Cyrus, and Jim Fyfe as Stuart.

Jackson obviously relishes the proposition of setting supernatural beings, with all their quirks and peculiarities, loose upon a small town, as prefigured in the colossally funny and fast-paced destruction wreaked by the zombies of *Braindead*. The ghosts in *The Frighteners* have their own reasons for lingering among the living of Fairwater, as Jackson explains: "The good thing with ghost movies is that you make up your own rules all the time; every movie has different rules. We had a lot of fun making up our ghost world in this movie. Generally, when you die you can choose to go up this tunnel of life that takes you to Heaven or whatever. But the ones who hang around are usually the loser, oddball types who refuse to go up the tunnel, or the cowardly guys who are too scared to go up there because they don't know what they're going to find. Michael's character, Frank, only lets these guys live in his house because they agree to go out and scare him up some work. It's a relationship that's formed on a mutual-dependency level. He needs them to help him do business, and they don't want to live in the cemetery, which is the only other choice they have, so

he lets them hang around his house, which is more comfortable for them."

Jackson's approach to his spectral cast will be more "fleshed out" than the customary ghost film. "The film has got a lot of character material in it, a lot of dialogue," he notes. "The ghosts are not treated as just a gimmick. They're characters who play important roles in the story, alongside Michael. When they pop up, I don't want people to think, 'Oh, it's a ghost,' but to think of them as characters, like any other characters in the film. They just happen to be dead."

Despite the record-breaking effects load, which numbers over 500 shots, effects techniques were mostly used to enhance the physical presence of the actors. "*The Frighteners* is not a special effects spectacle; it's mostly ghost shots. I didn't want to do this cheating thing, where the ghosts are like solid people; I wanted them to look like ghosts. So, they're translucent, and fly around, and we enhanced them with the computer. We have some entirely computer-generated characters — the villain is a CG character. Because Michael is the guy who gets to talk to the ghosts most of the time, we had to shoot him just talking to thin air, interacting by himself on the stage; months later we'd shoot the ghosts against blue screen, and put them in the scene.

"I wanted to keep the camera moving a lot. I didn't want it to be locked down, so most of the stuff was done with a motion-control camera. And it took us about seven months. It was a long, long shoot."

Working within the constraints of visual effects is not new to Jackson, who single-



handedly created the effects of *Bad Taste* and utilized progressively more elaborate effects in each of his subsequent films. For *Heavenly Creatures*, the director used computer graphics to enhance the magic dreamworld to which the teenaged murderers withdrew. Because Jackson prefers to work outside of Hollywood, the hefty effects' demands of *The Frighteners* necessitated the creation of a full-service digital production facility in Wellington, New Zealand (where Jackson was born on Halloween, 1961).

The filmmakers imported thirty-five Silicon Graphics workstations, some rented, some purchased, and some which were already owned by Universal and shipped from their digital studios in London. "When we did *Heavenly Creatures*, we got some basic computer equipment for about thirty CG shots, and one guy down there doing them, so we had the basis of the equipment," he remembers. The difference with *The Frighteners* is "a lot more gear, and a lot more people. We've got about fifty people working on the film at the moment, a lot of whom we got from the States; a lot of people who have worked at ILM in the past, and at various



other companies. They all liked the idea of coming down for six months and doing a movie down here." Most of the CG staff, gathered from Australia, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as a core of New Zealanders, were signed to short-term contracts covering the completion of the film, one of the factors that resulted in a price tag that is said to be half of what it would have cost had they contracted the usual L.A. effects firms, where fees for digital effects talent have taken a sharp turn skyward in the past year.

Considering the challenging content of Jackson's past films, it's hard to imagine "studio suits" sitting comfortably with him with a big-budget film in his hands. No doubt Jackson's budget-cutting skill, the patronage of the man who made *Forrest Gump*, and the distance between Wellington and L.A., all helped foster the studio's "hands-off" policy during *The Frightener*'s production. Jackson describes his studio relationships as "more positive than what I'm used to. I've never seen myself as being a studio-type of filmmaker, especially since I want to make films in New Zealand. I always thought that, if you

worked for a studio, you'd have to come over to the States to do it.

"It's been great. Obviously, Bob Zemeckis has been supportive and was very protective of me; he wanted me to make the film I wanted to make, and the studio had the same opinion. They've never once tried to influence me in doing anything. We wrote the script, we were writing it all through the shoot, and never once did they ever comment on the dailies that they were seeing in any sort of negative way. They never asked me to change anything, so the film has not been influenced by the studio at all. It is very much the film that we wanted to make."

Jackson began making films when he was 8, using his parents' Super-8 home-movie camera to "try and do something different from the usual boring birthday movies." He remembers: "I wanted to make movies ever since I saw the original *King Kong* when I was about 12. I saw it on TV, and that really was the movie that made me want to make films. Just the fact that this was so full of stuff that you couldn't hope to see in real life. I thought — Wow! What a great thing to do for a career, for a job. Rather than being an accountant or

a doctor or a lawyer, but to be someone who could create these imaginary situations. I just thought that would be such a wonderful thing to do with your life.

"So, from that point on, I made home movies and spent the rest of my childhood trying to steer myself into a film career, which I ultimately did pretty much by myself. I made *Bad Taste*, which was my first movie, in 16mm with my own camera which I had saved up for. I did it with my friends on the weekends. It took us four years to make it, and from that point on, with that movie done, I was able to get more films made and managed to steer my way into the career that I always dreamed of."

Jackson financed *Bad Taste* with his earnings as a photo engraver for a local newspaper, and then later with some funding from the New Zealand Film Commission. His relationship with the Film Commission continued through *Meet the Feebles* and *Braindead*, the latter garnering sixteen awards at film festivals around the world.

But it was *Heavenly Creatures* that won Jackson the keys to the kingdom, with a first-look deal with Miramax, where he has a few

Continued on page 70



*Kurt Russell returns as Snake Plissken in
Carpenter's Escape From L.A.*



Legendary filmmaker John Carpenter trashes L.A.

SNAKE PLISSKIN IS A HERO for the modern age, a cynical survivor who would shoot you or save your life with the same implacable indifference. Plisskin's character, introduced in 1981's *Escape From New York*, embodies both the darker aspects of man's imperative to survive, as well as the noble heights to which humanity, at its best, aspires. "What makes a hero is a singleness of purpose," says writer-director John Carpenter, a man who has tackled his own demons on screen for generations to watch enthralled. "It's a very, very firm focus. That's what's always defined a hero in literature and in movies, and Snake has that. He's focusing on one thing: He's going to save his butt. He's a very bad, innocent man. Nothing can change him. He's incorruptible."

John Carpenter, whose *Halloween* and *The Thing* are considered two of the scariest films ever made, knows all too well the downside of such single-mindedness. His goal these past twenty years has been to make diverse, original films — to defy the "horror director" tag his best-known films have made for him. In a Hollywood every bit as tricky as the setting for his newest movie, Carpenter has not just survived as a filmmaker, but has slowly

THE LAST BAD BOY

BY LISA STONE MACCARILLO



built a filmography far more diverse than those of such similarly "typed" contemporaries as Wes Craven or Tobe Hooper.

After a busy three years in which he's made two feature films and the *Body Bags* horror trilogy for Showtime, Carpenter is now putting the finishing touches on his first action opus since *Big Trouble in Little China*. *Escape From L.A.* pits legendary outlaw Snake Plisskin against a corrupt theocracy that rules America in the year 2013, while struggling to survive among the outcasts and miscreants that populate the island prison that once was the City of Los Angeles.

Fifteen years ago, *Escape From New York's* "final solution" to the crime problem had its own sharply satiric edge; Carpenter sees no less relevance in the theme today. "I've noticed some big changes in the country that have been taking place over a long time," Carpenter reflects. "The country's become extremely fascistic, and that's very much reflected in the future world we create in this movie.

"Los Angeles is an amazing place to live because it offers this unbelievable beautiful-skied freedom; at the same time, somebody'll pull up and shoot you in the face. It's very much the truth of today, only in science fiction

trappings. I think that's the only way these pictures last or work. You have to latch onto the truth, and put it in there. The first movie was about New York as a prison, and people would laugh and say, 'Well, it already is. There is a bit of truth to that.' It isn't really, but it can be a grim place, and there's truth to what we show in this film. The characters are much like the people that I deal with every day."

Though *Escape From New York* was a hit upon its release in 1981 and has garnered a massive cult following since then, Carpenter never thought of a sequel until he, producer Debra Hill, and star Kurt Russell were hit with some very real reminders of the risky possibilities of life in L.A. "Los Angeles has had its share of catastrophes over the past two years," says Carpenter. "It's seriously like living on the edge. And yet something about Los Angeles is mesmerizing. Kurt Russell said, 'You know what, let's have a good time.' So, we noodled around with the story and came up with some interesting ideas. We decided to put everything — earthquakes, fires, mud-

slides, riots — in the movie."

While Carpenter was finishing up *Village of the Damned*, he and longtime friends Debra Hill and Kurt Russell hammered out a game plan: Carpenter, Hill, and Russell would collaborate on the script, Hill and Russell would produce, Carpenter would direct, and Russell would once again don the eyepatch to become Snake Plisskin. "I didn't realize how much fun it was going to be to revisit the terrain," Carpenter remembers. "I had some fear right before we started shooting that I wasn't going to be able to put myself back where I needed to be, stylistically, to do this movie. I wrote the first one when I was in my twenties, in 1974. It wasn't made until the early '80s. Now we're in 1996 and I'm an 'old man.' Can I return to the days of yesteryear?

"The first day of shooting was like riding a bicycle. We got right back on and off we went. It came back so suddenly it was a shock. I don't need to worry about this movie; it has its own style, don't mess with it. Yet there are some things in this film that I think are deeper, funnier, and more resonant than in the first movie. We've come a long way since then in terms of the kinds of action films that people expect to see."



vening years. "He's been a gunfighter for profit over in New Vegas, Thailand; that's U.S. territory now — Vegas has been shifted over there. He has been wanted for 27 moral offenses since his escape. He's an outlaw, a bad guy, and the most wanted man on the planet. He's captured and brought to be deported, but what he's really there for is a secret mission that only he can do because he's ruthless."

The daughter of the U.S. president (Cliff Robertson) has stolen a Doomsday device and given it to a leader of the Shining Path, which has grown into an international revolutionary cult. A rescue team sent into L.A. to retrieve the device has been quickly and thoroughly massacred. "So, who're you gonna call when you have a problem like this?" rhetorizes Carpenter. "Go get Snake, 'cause he's the only one who's done it before," says Carpenter. "He rescued a president before; he can certainly do this. And the only way you're going to get him to do this — you're not going to get him to be a pawn; you can't threaten him with other peoples' lives because he doesn't have anybody he cares about — you have to threaten him with his own life. So, they inject him with a lethal drug and put a time clock on him, and say, 'You're going to die if you don't do this.' Otherwise, he doesn't care enough. He doesn't care about saving you; he just cares about moving on. Once again he's used by the Police Force to do their dirty work."

"Only this time things don't turn out quite the way everybody expects. He turns the tables in a very big way pretty much on all of mankind."

At the outset, Carpenter sat down with a map of Los Angeles and charted the course his hero would take through the ruined city.

Opposite, Malloy (Stacey Keach, left) and Brzen (Michelle Forbes, right) offer Snake an assignment he just can't refuse. Above, assorted street trash, from left: weasel-king Steve Buscemi as Map to the Stars Eddie, George Corraface as Cuervo Jones, and A.J. Langer as Utopia. Below, the behatted director coaches grizzled star Russell and Steve Buscemi.

"I tried to construct a story where he went through Los Angeles the right way," he says. "When I wrote *Escape from New York* I really didn't know anything about New York — I had bridges that don't exist. But in L.A., I figured out how he lands at the shoreline of the Caluenga Pass, and makes it all the way down to Anaheim to the ruins of Disneyland. He hang glides with a gang from the Queen Mary, which is now downtown, down to Anaheim. We got a lot of landmarks worked into it, not all of them directly related to him, but they're there — in ruins, of course. This is after a 9.6 earthquake, so it doesn't look the same."

With *Blade Runner*'s production designer, Lawrence G. Paull, on board, the filmmakers set out to find parts of the city that could be used as-is, or with minor alterations. "One of the first things we did was to go out one night and walk through L.A. from about midnight until three," Carpenter remembers. "The weird thing about Los Angeles at night is that nothing happens and it all looks too pretty. It's just a stunner. There's not enough money in the world to trash this. You can't shoot on Sunset. There ain't no way. So, the best way to do it was to create it and make you think you're there, and that's what we did." The filmmakers did find a few useful locations, including streets in Northridge that have remained untouched since the 1995 quake, as well as certain alleys and streets in downtown Los Angeles. The L.A. Coliseum provided another loca-





Above, Hershe Hernandez (Pam Grier) hangs in on a *Mission of Death!* Below, the Surgeon General of Beverly Hills (Bruce Campbell) considers reconstructive surgery for our hero. Opposite, hitchhiking—Snake Plissken style.

tion; everything else was created from scratch, much of it in an unused landfill in Carson.

To populate their vision of a futuristic L.A., the filmmakers created a menagerie of eccentric characters which attracted an eclectic, talented cast. Carpenter explains: "You've got a talent agent who has remained in L.A. named Map-to-the-Stars Eddie. He sells maps on Sunset, and kind of wheedles his way around the gangs." That role was practically written for Steve Buscemi, who has made a career pumping sympathetic life into film weasels since *Reservoir Dogs*. "You've got a guy who has had an operation and turned himself into a woman. He used to know Plissken when he was Carjack Malone, but he has now turned himself into Hershey Hernandez, this beautiful transsexual." This gender-bending role is filled by "blaxploitation" queen Pam Grier, whose other comeback film this year was the recent *Original Gangstas*. "And there's an old surfer, who is the most harmless of the bunch. He seems

not to care what's going on; all he wants to do is surf." The character Pipeline is played by Peter Fonda, in a bravura sequence, taking Snake to "ride the wild surf" down Wilshire Canyon on the crest of a tsunami. Other notables in the cast include genre hero Bruce Campbell as the maniacal "Surgeon General of Beverly Hills," Valeria Golino as Taslima, who forms a close bond with Plissken during his L.A. odyssey, and George Corraface as the Shining Path guerrilla Cuervo Jones. Grounding the cast are veteran actors Cliff Robertson as the corrupt U.S. president and Stacy Keach as his militant commander of police.

"Mostly, we were just looking for good actors and not trying to typecast somebody because they've just been in the latest action film," Carpenter remarks. "You've got all these characters that are very rich to begin with, so you look around for the cast and immediately some things pop into mind."

Carpenter and crew shot a total of 70 nights straight, a rigorous schedule even for the most seasoned. Cinematographer Gary B. Kibbe, who has worked with Carpenter on several films, including the texturally rich *In The Mouth of Madness* and the bleak *L.A. Story*. They live aimed to create a seamy, seductive city in ruins. "The cliché is cold, blue backlight," Carpenter notes. "It's an MTV cliché, it's science fiction movie cliché, it's action-movie cliché. We wanted to make this movie somewhat different, in L.A. terms, so we warmed it up a little. There's almost a torch-lit orangy feel that's more interesting than cold blue. The first movie was dank and this one's dank. It's a dank, dark film about a dark world ... nights are great for that. They hide a lot of sin."



Carpenter describes *Escape From L.A.* as a project fueled by passion, not only on the part of the main collaborators, but also on the part of Paramount Pictures, the studio backing the film, which helped create a pain-free atmosphere on the set.

"I think it was a matter of mutual trust," Carpenter reflects. "We were very collaborative in terms of their notes on the screenplay. I also needed to know the schedule and explain how I was going to do it, and I did that to their satisfaction. They saw the dailies and said, 'Great — you're making the movie we want.' I think it was a tremendous studio experience because we had a lot of passion for the film, and the head of the studio, Sherry Lansing, had a lot of passion for the film and felt we were doing it well. It's been the best experience I've ever had."

Carpenter's studio relationships haven't always been so copacetic. His commercial





breakthrough, the heart-stopping *Halloween*, earned \$75 million despite a budget of only \$300,000 — the kind of numbers Hollywood can't easily let go of. The result was a movie franchise that grew more ridiculous each time the venerable Michael Myers was dragged back from the dead. "It was too bad that they took that thing and ruined it like that," Carpenter says with a note of resignation. "I didn't want to do the sequel, and yet you don't want to be sued. You can't stop them from doing this. I tried with *Halloween III* to get rid of the character, Michael Myers, and just do a movie that was different, but audiences didn't want that. They wanted a xerox over and over again. But now you see what's happened to it after you've xeroxed it enough. It has no more life. There's no story there anymore. Zero."

For Carpenter, though, the loss of innocence came not with the bastardization of

Halloween, but with the mass rejection of the film that is arguably his masterpiece: *The Thing*. Written and directed by Carpenter, *The Thing* tells a claustrophobic, unrelenting tale of a group of scientists at an outpost in the Antarctic that is decimated one by one by a shapeshifting alien. Though more true to the original tale, "Who Goes There" by John W. Campbell, than the 1951 Howard Hawks chiller of the same name, Carpenter's atmospheric, eminently suspenseful 1982 remake received a less than warm reception in the year of *E.T.* Now, a decade and a half later, with the film gracing critics' "Top Ten" lists and fan-compiled surveys of the best movies ever made, *The Thing* is about to have its day in the sun when MCA/Universal releases a deluxe laserdisc edition.

"My creative life changed over one film, which is an interesting thing to reflect on now," he remembers. "*The Thing* really was a

movie that I was extremely proud of and I thought was extremely good, but it was hated by everybody, fans, audiences, critics. The vehemence of the hatred stunned me. It took me a long time to come to grips with it and say, 'What was that all about?' I've kind of got it in perspective now that I'm older, but when you're young and you go through these things, they can be pretty powerful experiences. It's always easy looking from the outside and saying 'Aw, the hell with that.' Well, guess what? I think every director probably gets his heart broken someplace along the line and then recovers, and I think that's the sign of somebody surviving it, escaping from it somehow. You can't let it destroy you."

As with the mythical Plisskin, you get the sense there's something inside Carpenter that can't be touched, that can't be compromised or corrupted. As if he's come through the rubble into the daylight without a scratch. □

was a combination of that and wanting to say something about the human condition."

DiPego left the idea to percolate for some time. "I wasn't sure how I could depict genius in a real way, and on a human scale. Ultimately, I found my way into it, and the writing didn't take that long. The whole thing moved like a fast train toward production."

Unlike many big studio pictures, *Phenomenon* survived the development process relatively unscathed. "There were notes, but most of them were heartfelt suggestions," says DiPego. "It was a very good give-and-take. This was a model of how filmmaking should be, where the writer, producer, and director form a kind of partnership. John got involved, too; he liked the script a lot, and wanted to make sure it didn't change too radically."

While films driven by characters and ideas can be a hard sell, DiPego says that Disney was intrigued by the script's honesty and its positive message. "It fits into that *Forrest Gump*/*Field of Dreams* category — films with an element of fantasy in them, that are about extraordinary events that happen to ordinary people," notes DiPego. "There's also a vein of humor that runs through them; hopefully it also provides some tears and poignancy."

As a genre entry, *Phenomenon* stands well apart from the pulse-pounding blockbusters usually deemed appropriate for the summer season. "It asks what would we do and what powers would we have if we could use all our brain power," says DiPego. "So naturally Mally is able to do things that put the film in the realm of what we would call 'speculative fiction,' such as telekinesis and reading minds. The telekinesis is the most visual aspect of it but again we handle that on a much more human scale. It's not going to have giant special effects, because we want the audience to really live through this with George, and not suddenly have his character development obscured by big stunts and major special effects."

In a bold move, Disney recently decided to move *Phenomenon*'s U.S. release from late July to July 3, the territory otherwise "owned" by the highly anticipated *Independence Day*. While Turteltaub concedes that his film may not open with the "must-see" appeal of the SF blockbuster, he feels that it casts a wider net, with characters and a story to which everyone can relate.

"I think people are going to get more coming out of this film than they expect," says Turteltaub. "It's a big movie in that it deals with big concepts, though it actually plays like a very small story. There's a sense of scope when you're watching it, but at the same time it's also a very small, sweet story, which I don't think you see a lot anymore. Ultimately, anything you think this movie is going to be, I expect it's going to be much more than that." □

and we can sell popcorn in between. It's the classic conflict between art and commerce.

"And I didn't want to put a three-hour movie in theaters. I didn't think the film was going to be that long, but that's how long it took to tell that story. Maybe it had something to do with underwater, everything just



Cameron's faith in computer created f/x, bolstered by results on *The Abyss*, led to the more ambitious f/x of *T-2* and *True Lies*.

sort of moves slower. So I had this long film. The studio didn't force me to cut it. There was a lot of pressure, but I really cut my self. And it was a painful thing to do (but) I always thought I had done the best possible version of *The Abyss*.

"Couple of years go by, and we decide to put the scenes back in, and finish everything, just for ourselves. And we sat down and watched this three-hour monster — you know what? It's a pretty darn good film, and I think maybe even a better film than what we released."

With *The Abyss: Special Edition* finding a new legion of fans, Cameron is now fairly satisfied with that picture, although he admits: "If I had one thing to do over again, I would have put even more confidence in the computer graphics, but at the time it was an unproven technique."

That "unproven technique" was, of course, about to change the face of entertainment: the technique was called Computer Graphic Imagery, or CGI, and the film was *Terminator II: Judgment Day*.

"I had this idea for a liquid metal guy, and I was on the phone with Dennis Murin at ILM and Stan Winston all the time, saying, 'What if I wrote a scene like this, how would we do it?' So it really developed with a knowledge of what might be possible — not what was possible at that moment, but what might be possible within a year."

With a budget of \$100 million, *T2: Judgment Day* was the most expensive movie ever made at the time of its release. Still, the film wowed audiences with its revolutionary effects, and won over the critics with its "Tin Man gets a heart" storyline. Grossing \$300 million at the box office, *T2* proved its budget was well spent, indeed.

Cameron followed this mega-hit with the \$120 million *True Lies*, breaking his own

record for film expense. Once again, the risk paid off, but, of equal importance to Cameron, *True Lies* showed off the potential of his new effects house: "True Lies was the first film for Digital Domain as an effects facility," he says, "and the relationship was perfect. It couldn't have been better."

But why, on top of writing, directing, and producing films, would Cameron want to start such a large company? "The stuff that's in my head — I can't do it myself," Cameron explains. "I need the computer graphics artists and the animators, I need a big team. I need a big army, really. It's all ultimately selfish, because I know that ultimately it's gonna come back around and make my films better."

If the new *T2-3D* attraction at Universal Studios, Florida is any indication, Cameron certainly seems to no longer have any qualms about working with relatively unproven technologies. That shoot's large-format film, 3-D camera weighed 450 pounds. "To get the kind of kinetic visual style that I'm used to doing was really an order of magnitude more difficult than it is with normal 35-millimeter, two-dimensional cameras. But we knew going in that was the big challenge — and we solved it."

After conquering 3-D, Cameron was back to work on his next project, the \$100 million *Titanic*. At first, it would seem a romantic period piece would be quite a departure for the sci-fi loving Cameron, but not when you hear him tell it: "You know, fewer people have been to the wreck of the *Titanic* than have been to the Moon. And I thought, 'Instead of simulating it, why don't we just go shoot the *Titanic*?' So I got in touch with these Russian sub guys, and we actually filmed the *Titanic*. We built special cameras, and titanium camera housings — a lot of high science went into it."

"In fact, most of *Titanic* is going to be shot in a tank less than three feet deep. You'll just believe you're on the ocean."

In the very near future, Cameron may actually have us believing in actors who aren't even there, except as projections from the core memory of his super-computers. With the enthusiasm of a kid for a toy, Cameron briefly explained to us Digital Domain's motion-capture equipment: "... your performer has points on their body, that are read by the camera ... and then the computer software will take all the data and interpolate from it a motion file. That performance now exists in three-dimensional computer space — and can be used to drive a synthetic character."

And what will Cameron do with these 'synthetic characters' once he and his crew have perfected them? He jerks a thumb toward the motion capture computer: "Spideyman! I definitely be in here," he says decisively, ignoring, for the moment, the fact that the rights to that long-awaited project remain in legal limbo.

But I wouldn't bet for a minute against James Cameron "making it happen." □

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The Smallest Policeman

YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD BY NOW ABOUT the television rating system that's currently being devised. Soon, all U.S. broadcast and cable channels will have a little something extra; a signal that will tell a silicon chip inside new TV sets whether or not the broadcast that we've tuned in is appropriate viewing for certain age ranges. U.K. broadcasters are considering a similar device.

It's called the "V-chip," and I thoroughly understand why so many parents feel that it's needed. In principle, though, I don't care for the idea, not a little bit: I don't think a ratings committee is a good substitute for parental judgment.

As just one example of the absurdities to come, consider this: Under the scheme now being considered, a movie like *Raging Bull* could be locked out on the basis of its realistic boxing scenes, as well as for its language. But actual boxing — with real men beating the bloody pulp out of one another — won't be rated, as sports in general will be exempt from the ratings. Certain sports, however, "aren't really sports," like wrestling, where the violence is clearly staged. These will be rated. In other words, fake mayhem will be filterable, but the real thing won't. Be prepared for more absurdity, as we off-load a share of the moral responsibility toward our children to a bureaucratic committee and a slice of silicon.

You might ask why I should care, when the V-chip will be entirely under the control of viewers. With the parental code, you could turn it off and not even know that it's there.

Even if you never turn on the little television "microcop," you will know that it's there by its profound effect on all television programming. Consider, for instance, the same-sex kisses featured in recent episodes of *Babylon-5* and *Deep Space 9*. These caused barely a ripple among fans, and all the reactions I heard were positive (except for those who accused one show of ripping the other off, of course).

But suppose you are a TV producer; your series is syndicated, and therefore has a much tougher time racking up ratings than the network shows. Then suppose you receive a script just a shade bolder than the usual episode. It might squeak by the ratings board with approval for a general audience; but it also might get a rating that results in automatic tune-out by up to 30 percent of your target audience.

Of course, if you have any regard at all for your own job, and for the livelihood of everyone that you work with, you will be blue-penciling that scene the second that you read it. You won't be making it better — you'll be making it safer, and blander, and pretty much like

everything else on television.

And the greatest irony is that the V-chip could ultimately create license for the very kind of programming that it was meant to counter. Locking children out of certain programs creates an "adults only" category, faced with the prospect of a reduced audience and therefore reduced budgets. Naked bodies and fake blood come a lot cheaper than literature scripts and high production values; programmers specializing in this adult audience could be forced into a contest of sensationalism and shock to win an audience. With our friend the V-chip in place, "protecting the children," programmers may find the opening they need to go far beyond present limits — as happened when the film industry devised the "R" and "X" ratings.

The Sci-Fi Channel, because of its unique programming niche, won't be as profoundly affected as most points on the dial will be, at least not at first. But television creates a national environment that affects all of us — even those members of Congress and the White House executives who claim little time for television in their lives, but nevertheless found the time for this ill-considered scheme to be imposed on television viewers.

These people have given very little thought to how television works, or to the broader effects of the V-chip. This well-meaning attempt to give parents control over the TV environment could wind up polarizing programming into a kid-oriented puddle of pablum on one hand, and an adults-only cesspool on the other.

And this may just be a start. This little policeman that the government has already mandated into our televisions will soon be followed by a second. A chip that will enforce copyright law is in the works, with proposed legislation that may include fines of up to \$1 million for bypassing it. This legislation can be viewed as a whole other issue, with many negative implications of its own — the new copyright chip could potentially ensure that you pay a fee every time that you watch a recorded program.

The late Isaac Asimov's stories of robots often concerned how the simple rules that a robot must follow have unforeseen results when the robot is confronted with a morally complex world. The current attempt to automate the morality of television producers and consumers may soon teach us all a similar lesson.

— Ed Flixman

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The views expressed in this editorial do not necessarily represent the views of The Sci-Fi Channel and U.S.A. Networks.

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FRIGHTENERS

Continued from page 61

projects in development, including a major
fantasy film set in an enchanted kingdom.
He is also in demand at the original monster
factory, Universal Pictures, with *The Fright-
eners* about to release, and an offer he could
not refuse on the table: the chance to return
to Skull Island for a remake of *King Kong*.

"I'd never even thought about remaking
it, I had no ambition in that direction. The
movie was just this event in my life that was
very influential. Then, about two months
ago, Universal said, 'We want to make a
remake of *King Kong*,' and it was like, well,
that happens to be my favorite film. I
thought, maybe this time, unlike what hap-
pened in 1976 when De Laurentiis made it,
maybe *King Kong* should be made by some-
one who loves the original movie, someone
who has a real passion for it. So I thought,
'OK, I'll do it.' It was almost like repaying my
debt to Kong, in a way. That movie caused
me to be where I am today, so the least I can
do is to do it justice in a remake, or give it a
go. I don't know what I'm going to do yet,
but I'll think about it."

Universal has also agreed to allow Jackson
to produce the film entirely at the Well-
ington facility, which gives the director "a sense
of security. I don't really want to come to the
States to make movies, partly because I live
in New Zealand, and that's where I'm com-
fortable. It's a security thing. I know very
well how to make films there, and I would be
a bit more insecure in L.A. I've got good peo-
ple that I work with down there. Certainly
we'll make our next film there if we can; I'd
like to because it's just a good place to make
films. We have nonunion crews, and there's
nobody working just for the money; they just
do it because they love doing it, so they're
very good in a team sense."

"We wrote *The Frighteners* to be shot in the
States because we thought that's what was
going to happen. It's set in this all-Ameri-
can town; but we said to Bob and the studio
that we were very confident that we could
find places in New Zealand that could cer-
tainly be perfectly believable as small-town
U.S.A., and I'm sure that we've done that.
We've shown the film to quite a few people
who thought it was shot somewhere in
northern California, so it's obviously
worked out OK."

As Jackson and his post-production crew
enter the home stretch, heading for *The
Frighteners'* completion, the writer-director
— still a relative newcomer despite his
worldwide following, his many awards, and
his roster of fiercely imaginative films — has
simple hopes that audiences will enjoy it: "It
is a strange movie. We've injected a lot of
quirkiness into it. I just hope that people
come out of it thinking that they've seen
something different and original and unlike
anything they've seen before." □

THE CROW

Continued from page 55

some people felt betrayed. And there was
one guy who sent me a death threat, saying
that he was the Crow." Goyer kept the online
fans updated on the progress of the film,
while bouncing some ideas off of them.

In his continuing relationship with Marvel
Comics, Goyer's name is attached to numer-
ous developing projects, including *Ghost
Rider*, and *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.*,
under development at Fox Television's TV
movie division, as well as *Blade*, a feature
project casting Wesley Snipes as Marvel's
vampire hunter versus an underworld com-
munity of Los Angeles vampires. "John Nor-
rington will direct that one," says Goyer. "It's
a very high-tech vampire film, quite differ-
ent from any of the other vampire movies
that have come out." Also under the Marvel
banner is *Venom* — Marvel's "alternate Spi-
derman" character — in development as a
feature film, and likely to beat Jim Cameron's
Spiderman epic out of the starting gate.

Goyer recently served as writer and exe-
cutive producer on *Enemy*, a Fox TV pilot
based on the five-issue *Dark Horse* comics
series, starring Billy Wirth as a reluctant
hero, hounded into action by the spirits of
the unrestful dead. The finished pilot was
delivered to Fox in May, with a decision
about its series possibilities expected by the
time you read this.

Fans will be most anxious, however, for
news of *Dark City*, the long-awaited second
feature by Alex Proyas, director of the first
Crow film, which has now spent nearly two
years in development. With filming sched-
uled to start in Sydney, Australia, this July,
Goyer is collaborating with Proyas on the
final draft of the script. While Goyer concedes
that fans of *The Crow's* brand of gothic brood
will likely be drawn by *Dark City* as well, he's
quick to point out that "it's a very different
kind of film — less of an action picture. It
does have action, and it has special effects,
but it's almost a German expressionist film in
some ways. I find it difficult to talk about,
because it defies description, and also
because it's really Alex's baby."

Goyer has been friends with Proyas for
some time, and once previously brushed
with the possibility of collaboration, when
Columbia approached Proyas with Goyer's
script for *Dr. Strange*. "They didn't realize
that Alex and I were tight, though," Goyer
notes, "so they didn't realize that I was going
to hear about it when they told Alex that they
considered the script 'too strange.' And
y'know, Alex is not the kind of director you
go to and say, 'dumb it down.'"

Columbia still holds the script, but Goyer's
hopes for a decent *Dr. Strange* seem slim. "As
I said to another interviewer," he quips,
"Columbia wants to make *Dr. Mundane*." In
which case, they seem to have picked the
wrong guy. □

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TIME	Monday - Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00	Informational	Informational	Informational
6:30			
7:00	Animation Station: The Fantastic Voyage		
7:30	Terrahawks		
8:00	Back to the Future/Galaxy High		
8:30	Transformers/New Adven. of Gigantor***		
9:00	Lost in Space	Saturday Anime (movie)	Sci-Fi Trader
9:30			Mysteries, Magic, Miracles
10:00	Beauty and the Beast		C-Net Central
10:30			The Web
11:00	Dark Shadows	The Anti-Gravity Room	
11:30	Dark Shadows (Fri: Trader)	The Odyssey	The New Edge
Noon	Sci-Fi Series Collection	Moonlight Matinee	Sci-Fi Buzz
12:30			Inside Space
1:00	Alfred Hitchcock Presents		Starman
1:30	Tales From the Darkside		
2:00	Swamp Thing	Moonlight Matinee	U.F.O.
2:30	Mon: Odyssey Tue-Fri My Secret ID		
3:00	Buck Rogers/Battlestar Galactica/Galactica 1980*		Moonlight Matinee
3:30			
4:00	The Incredible Hulk	Radiation Theater	
4:30			Radiation Theater
5:00	The Bionic Woman		
5:30			
6:00	The Six Million Dollar Man	Amazing Stories	
6:30		The Odyssey	Sci-fi Trader

EVENING

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7:00	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	SF-Prev. ****
7:30	Monsters	Monsters	Monsters	Monsters	SF-Prev. Show****	Trailer Park	Myst/Mag/Mir
8:00	Forever Knight	Quantum Leap	Quantum Leap	Quantum Leap	Kolchak Nightstalker	Sci-Fi Feature	C-Net Central
8:30						Film	The Odyssey
9:00	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**		Alien Nation
9:30							
10:00	Friday 13th: Series	Friday 13th: Series	Friday 13th: Series	Friday 13th: Series	Sci-Fi Buzz	Max Headroom	War of the Worlds
10:30					Inside Space		

LATE NIGHT

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
11:00	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Trailer Park
11:30	Monsters	Monsters	Monsters	Monsters	SF-Prev. Show****	Trailer Park	Myst/Mag/Mir
Midnight	Forever Knight	Quantum Leap	Quantum Leap	Quantum Leap	Kolchak Nightstalker	Sci-Fi Feature	C-Net Central
12:30							The Web
1:00	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**	SF Series Collect.**		
1:30							The New Edge
2:00	Friday 13th: Series	Friday 13th: Series	Friday 13th: Series	Friday 13th: Series	Sci-Fi Buzz	Max Headroom	Sci-Fi Trader
2:30					Inside Space		War of the
3:00	Informational	Informational	Informational	Thriller	Thriller	Thriller	Worlds
3:30							Informational

All programming shown Eastern Standard Time. Please adapt for your local time zone. Titles in red denote original programming. All programming subject to change. This schedule is effective through 6/30/96. *Buck Rogers, Battlestar Galactica, and Galactica 1980 are shown in rotation. ** Sci-Fi Movie airs one week per month. SF Series Collection titles for July are Golden Years and New Dark Shadows; ***Friday, 8:30 am: Anti-Gravity Room, ****Working Title

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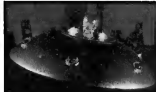
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1039	1962 TOPPS MARS ATTACKS REPRINT SET	\$19.95	1040	1962 TOPPS MARS ATTACKS REPRINT SET	\$19.95	1041	1962 TOPPS MARS ATTACKS REPRINT SET	\$19.95
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1045	1962 TOPPS MARS ATTACKS REPRINT SET	\$19.95	1046	1962 TOPPS MARS ATTACKS REPRINT SET	\$19.95	1047	1962 TOPPS MARS ATTACKS REPRINT SET	\$19.95
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JULY-AUGUST MOVIES AND SPECIALS ON THE SCI-FI CHANNEL

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3

7:00 p.m. Making of
"Independence Day"
1996, Special

11:00 p.m. Making of
"Independence Day"
1996, Special

THURSDAY, JULY 4

9:00 a.m. Lily C.A.T.
1993, Science Fiction
12:00 p.m. Colossus:
The Forbin Project
1970, Science Fiction,
Eric Braeden, Susan
Clark

2:00 p.m. The Haunted
1991, Horror, Sally
Kirkland

4:00 p.m. Omen 4: The
Awakening
1991, Horror, Faye Grant

6:00 p.m. Making of
"Independence Day"
1996, Special

8:00 p.m. Title TBA
12:00 a.m. Title TBA

4:00 a.m. Overdrawn at the
Memory Bank
1983, Science Fiction, Raul
Jula

FRIDAY, JULY 5

3:00 p.m. Transformations
1988, Science Fiction, Rex
Smith

4:30 p.m. Title TBA
8:00 p.m. Making of
"Independence Day"
1996, Special

SATURDAY, JULY 6

7:30 p.m. Making of
"Independence Day"
1996, Special

11:30 p.m. Making of
"Independence Day"
1996, Special

SUNDAY, JULY 7

1:00 p.m. Making of
"Independence Day"
1996, Special

MONDAY, JULY 8

9:00 a.m. The Venus Wars
(letterboxed)
1993, Science Fiction

12:00 p.m. Mothra
1962, Science Fiction, Hiroshi
Koizumi

2:00 p.m. King Kong Escapes
1968, Science Fiction, Rhodes
Reason, Mie Hama

4:00 p.m. Title TBA
7:00 p.m. Making of
"Independence Day"
1996, Special

8:00 p.m. Official Denial
1993, Science Fiction, Parker
Stevenson, Erin Grey

11:00 p.m. Making of
"Independence Day"
1996, Special

12:00 a.m. Official Denial
1993, Science Fiction, Parker
Stevenson, Erin Grey



The sci-fi classic *Dune* airs on July 21.

4:00 a.m. Conquest of Space
1955, Science Fiction, Eric
Fleming, Walter Brooke

TUESDAY, JULY 14

3:00 p.m. Doctor Mordrid:
Master of the Unknown
1992, Fantasy, Jeffrey Combs,
Yvette Nipar

4:30 p.m. Official Denial
1993, Science Fiction, Parker
Stevenson, Erin Grey

WEDNESDAY, JULY 15

7:00 p.m. Warped in Space
1996, Science Fiction
9:00 p.m. King Kong vs.
Godzilla

1963, Science Fiction, Michael
Keith, James Yagi

11:00 p.m. Warped in Space
1996, Science Fiction
1:00 a.m. King Kong vs.
Godzilla

1963, Science Fiction, Michael
Keith, James Yagi

THURSDAY, JULY 16

9:00 p.m. Godzilla on
Monster Island
1972, Science Fiction, Hiroshi
Ishikawa, Tomoko Umeda

1:00 a.m. Godzilla on
Monster Island
1972, Science Fiction, Hiroshi
Ishikawa, Tomoko Umeda

1963, Science Fiction, Hiroshi
Ishikawa, Tomoko Umeda

FRIDAY, JULY 17

9:00 p.m. Godzilla vs.
Hedorah (letterboxed)
1972, Science Fiction, Akira
Yamauchi, Hiroyuki Kawase

1:00 a.m. Godzilla vs.
Hedorah (letterboxed)
1972, Science Fiction, Akira
Yamauchi, Hiroyuki Kawase

SATURDAY, JULY 18

7:30 p.m. Warped in Space
1996, Science Fiction
9:00 p.m. Destroy all
Monsters (letterboxed)

1968, Science Fiction, Akira
Kubo, Jun Tazaki

11:30 p.m. Warped in Space
1996, Science Fiction
1:00 a.m. Destroy all
Monsters (letterboxed)

1968, Science Fiction, Akira
Kubo, Jun Tazaki

SUNDAY, JULY 19

9:00 p.m. Godzilla vs.
the Cosmic Monster
1974, Science Fiction,
Masaaki Daimon,
Kazuya Aoyama

1:00 a.m. Godzilla vs.
the Cosmic Monster
1974, Science Fiction,
Masaaki Daimon,
Kazuya Aoyama

MONDAY, JULY 20

9:00 a.m. Casshan:
Robot Hunter
1993, Science Fiction
12:00 p.m. Critters 3

1991, Horror, Aimee

Brooks, Don Opper
2:00 p.m. Critters 4
1991, Science Fiction, Brad
Dourif, Angela Basset

4:00 p.m. Official Denial
1993, Science Fiction, Parker
Stevenson, Erin Grey

6:00 p.m. Warped in Space
1996, Science Fiction
8:00 p.m. Waxwork 2: Lost in
Time

1991, Horror, Zach Galligan,
Alexander Godunov

12:00 a.m. Waxwork 2: Lost in
Time

1991, Horror, Zach Galligan,
Alexander Godunov

3:00 a.m. Warped in Space
1996, Science Fiction

4:30 a.m. The Space Children
1958, Science Fiction, Adam
Williams, Peggy Webber

TUESDAY, JULY 21

3:00 p.m. The Giant Spider
Invasion
1975, Science Fiction, Steve
Brodie, Barbara Hale

4:30 p.m. The Sentinel
1977, Horror, Cristina Raines,
Ava Gardner

8:00 p.m. Warped in Space
1996, Science Fiction

WEDNESDAY, JULY 22

9:00 a.m. Vampire Hunter "D"
1990, Horror
12:00 p.m. The Navigator: A
Medieval Odyssey

1988, Time Travel, Hamish
McFarlane, Bruce Lyons

2:00 p.m. Dune
1984, Science Fiction, Kyle
MacLachlan, Sting

8:00 p.m. Repo Man
1984, Comedy, Emilio
Estevez, Harry Dean Stanton

12:00 a.m. Repo Man
1984, Comedy, Emilio
Estevez, Harry Dean Stanton

4:00 a.m. The Skull
1965, Horror, Christopher
Lee, Peter Cushing

THURSDAY, JULY 23

3:00 p.m. Dollman vs.
Demonic Toys
1993, Science Fiction, Tim

JULY-AUGUST MOVIES AND SPECIALS ON THE SCI-FI CHANNEL

Thomson, Tracy Scoggins
4:30 p.m. **Captain Kronos:**
Vampire Hunter
1974, Horror, Horst Janson,
John Carson

SATURDAY, AUGUST 3

9:00 a.m. **Demon City**
Shinjuku
1992, Science Fiction
12:00 p.m. **Puppet Master 2**
1990, Horror, Elizabeth
MacLellan, Colin Bensen
2:00 p.m. **Puppet Master 3:**
Toulon's Revenge
1991, Horror, Guy Rolfe
4:00 p.m. **Puppet Master 4**
1993, Horror, Gordon Currie
8:00 p.m. **Conan the Destroyer**
1984, Fantasy, Arnold
Schwarzenegger, Grace Jones
12:00 a.m. **Conan the Destroyer**
1984, Fantasy, Arnold
Schwarzenegger, Grace Jones
4:00 a.m. **Puppet Master 4**
1993, Horror, Gordon Currie

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4

3:00 p.m. **The Terramorphs**
1967, Science Fiction, Simon
Oates, Zena Marshall
4:30 p.m. **Nightflyers**
1987, Science Fiction, Catherine
M. Stewart, Michael Praed

SATURDAY, AUGUST 10

9:00 a.m. **Dominion: Tank**
Police (Part 1)
1992, Science Fiction
12:00 p.m. **The Bug**
1975, Horror, Bradford
Dillman, Joanna Miles
2:00 p.m. **Phase IV**
1974, Science Fiction, Nigel
Davenport, Lynne Frederick
4:00 p.m. **The Fly 2**
1989, Horror, Eric Stoltz,
Daphne Zuniga
8:00 p.m. **Deep Red**
1994, Science Fiction, Michael
Biehn, Joanna Pacula
12:00 a.m. **Deep Red**
1994, Science Fiction, Michael
Biehn, Joanna Pacula
4:00 a.m. **Sweet Scent of**
Death
1986, Murder/Mystery, Dean
Stockwell, Shirley Knight

SUNDAY, AUGUST 11

3:00 p.m. **Dr. Cyclops**
1940, Science Fiction, Albert
Dekker, Janice Logan
4:30 p.m. **Deep Red**
1994, Science Fiction, Michael
Biehn, Joanna Pacula

MONDAY, AUGUST 12

8:00 p.m. **V: The Mini-Series**
Part 1
1983, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant
12:00 a.m. **V: The Mini-Series**
Part 1
1983, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant

TUESDAY, AUGUST 13

8:00 p.m. **V: The Mini-Series**
Part 2
1983, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant
12:00 a.m. **V: The Mini-Series**
Part 2
1983, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14

8:00 p.m. **V: The Final Battle**
Part 1
1984, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant
12:00 a.m. **V: The Final Battle**
Part 1
1984, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant

THURSDAY, AUGUST 15

8:00 p.m. **V: The Final Battle**
Part 2
1984, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant
12:00 a.m. **V: The Final Battle**
Part 2
1984, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant

FRIDAY, AUGUST 16

8:00 p.m. **V: The Final Battle**
Part 3
1984, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant
12:00 a.m. **V: The Final Battle**
Part 3
1984, Science Fiction, Mark
Singer, Faye Grant

SATURDAY, AUGUST 17

9:00 a.m. **Dominion: Tank**
Police (Part 2)
1992, Science Fiction
12:00 p.m. **Stowaway to the**
Moon
1975, Science Fiction, Lloyd
Bridges, Michael Link
2:00 p.m. **Not of This World**
1991, Science Fiction, Lisa
Hartman, A. Martinez
4:00 p.m. **Deep Red**
1994, Science Fiction, Michael
Biehn, Joanna Pacula
8:00 p.m. **Mr. Stitch**
1995, Horror, Rutger Hauer
12:00 a.m. **Mr. Stitch**
1995, Horror, Rutger Hauer
4:00 a.m. **Last Video and**
Testament
1984, Suspense, Deborah
Raffin, David Langton

SUNDAY, AUGUST 18

2:00 p.m. **The Fury**
1978, Horror, Kirk Douglas,
Amy Irving
4:30 p.m. **Mr. Stitch**
1995, Horror, Rutger Hauer
SATURDAY, AUGUST 24
9:00 a.m. **Odin: Photon Space**
Sailor Starlight
1990, Anime
12:00 p.m. **Tennis Court**
1984, Horror, Peter Graves,
Hannah Gorgon
1:30 p.m. **Wedlock**
1994, Science Fiction, Rutger

Hauer, Mimi Rodgers
3:30 p.m. **Mr. Stitch**
1995, Horror, Rutger Hauer
7:00 p.m. **World Wide Weird!**
1996

8:00 p.m. **Cronos**
1993, Horror, Ron Perlman
11:00 p.m. **World Wide Weird!**
1996

12:00 a.m. **Cronos**
1993, Horror, Ron Perlman
4:00 a.m. **World Wide Weird!**
1996

SUNDAY, AUGUST 25

1:00 p.m. **Mandroid**
1993, Science Fiction, Brian
Cousins, Jane Caldwell
2:30 p.m. **Robot Wars**
1993, Science Fiction, Don
Michael Paul, Barbara
Crampton
4:00 p.m. **Killbots**
1986, Science Fiction, Kelli
Maroney, Tony O'Dell
8:00 p.m. **World Wide Weird!**
1996

MONDAY, AUGUST 26

9:00 p.m. **Theme Week: Anime**
1:00 a.m. **Theme Week: Anime**

TUESDAY, AUGUST 27

9:00 p.m. **Theme Week: Anime**
1:00 a.m. **Theme Week: Anime**

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28

9:00 p.m. **Theme Week: Anime**
1:00 a.m. **Theme Week: Anime**

THURSDAY, AUGUST 29

7:30 p.m. **World Wide Weird!**
1996
9:00 p.m. **Theme Week: Anime**
11:30 p.m. **World Wide Weird!**
1996

FRIDAY, AUGUST 30

9:00 a.m. **Project A-KO (let-**
terboxed)
1992, Science Fiction
12:00 p.m. **Frankenstein and**
the Monster from Hell
1974, Horror, Peter Cushing,
Shane Bryant

2:00 p.m. **Cat People**
1982, Horror, Nastasia
Kinski, Malcolm McDowell
4:00 p.m. **Mr. Stitch**
1995, Horror, Rutger Hauer
6:00 p.m. **World Wide Weird!**
1996

8:00 p.m. **Videodrome**
1983, Science Fiction, James
Woods, Deborah Harry
12:00 a.m. **Videodrome**
1983, Science Fiction, James
Woods, Deborah Harry

4:00 a.m. **Jekyll & Hyde:**
Together Again
1982, Horror/Satire, Mark
Blankfield, Bess Armstrong

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INDEPENDENCE DAY

Continued from page 49

fully, because we wouldn't want it to interfere with our primary purpose, to tell stories. Our long-range goal is to make Centropolis a name that science fiction fans will know and associate with quality work. We formed a toy partnership with Trendmasters, not because they're the biggest company on the block, but because their quality is the best.



At press time, the only images of the film's ruthless, 8-foot-tall aliens come from Trendmasters, the toy company marketing the soon-to-be-sold-out action figures.

Our computer game is with Bethesda, rather than one of the bigger software names, because of the tremendous programming talent they have on staff there. They have three world-class game programmers on staff, and there are only a handful of those in the world. In fact, Chris Weaver of Bethesda, was the model that we drew upon in writing the character that Jeff Goldblum plays in *Independence Day*.

SFE: By the way, what is on those computer disks that will come with Trendmasters' *Independence Day* toys?

Devlin: They're basically fun brain-teasers; they're not games that you'll play over and over again, but playing them is meant to provide a sense of background for the toy, and perhaps some insights into the movie that you might not otherwise have.

SFE: I was shocked to see, on the Trendmasters site on the World Wide Web, pictures of your aliens.

Devlin: Ah, but that's not the whole alien yet. There's another aspect that's yet to be revealed. There's a whole system to these aliens that I'm really proud of.

In my opinion, the two best villainous aliens in memory are the original *Alien*, and the alien in *Predator*. They showed you enough in each of those films so that you understood just what they were about, without a lot of back-story.

The look of each of them was part of it, but they also conveyed a certain personality — for instance, by portraying *Predator* as a hunter, who killed for sport. Suddenly you understand the character; and the other is looking for a host for its eggs. So when we sat down with Patrick Tatopolis and Oliver Schull, we said that's what you have to come to. And they came up with a marvelous, unique system for the aliens, which will not be revealed anywhere until the film opens. When you do find out what the whole system is, it really is cool.

Basically, what we've done is tapped into existing mythology about aliens and UFOs, and taken it one step further. What we're hoping the reaction will be, when people see this movie, is that all the little bits and pieces of UFO mythology that we've all picked up over the years, will come together and make sense — the crop circles, the abductions, all of it — all ties together into one thing.

SFE: When *StarGate* opened, you were talking about a trilogy of films. Now I've heard that MGM is developing a television series. What's going on there?

Devlin: The last we heard was MGM, which bought the rights from Studio Canal Plus, is trying to do a series, and we're not involved in that at all. We always wanted to tell that story as a trilogy of films; now MGM seems committed to doing a series.

SFE: Any difficult feelings about that?

Devlin: It's always hard to see your baby in other hands, obviously, but we're not in the TV business, and we couldn't afford to buy the rights ourselves. But, as far as the sequel films go, there's been no talk about whether that will happen or not; I guess time will tell.

SFE: Finally, we hear you're very close to a deal with Tristar on *Godzilla*.

Devlin: I would say that, while it's not a done deal, it's highly likely that we'll get involved. Basically, we just have to solve a couple of story problems that both Roland and I have. The thing is, it's very hard to work out a story for the next film when we're still absorbed in completing this one.

SFE: I've heard conflicting stories about which of Tristar's *Godzilla* scripts you planned to go with.

Devlin: Ultimately, our decision was that if we do it, we're abandoning all the script work that's been done before. We're going back to the original *Godzilla* movie, and remaking that — a complete 'Page 1' rewrite.

After giving it some thought, we came up with a whole different take on that first story, which actually gives us a compelling reason to make this film, which is what I think was missing before. Now we have that answered, though we're still working on a couple of small story problems, which we should be able to handle.

Postscript: One week after this interview, Tristar officially announced the making of Emmerich and Devlin's *Godzilla* for a summer, 1998 release. □

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WARANT
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In three new collections of insider interviews, B-movie masters and horror mavens offer a talk on the wild side.

BY LAWRENCE TUCKER

THEY MAKE MOVIES WITH TITLES LIKE *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers*, *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-a-Rama*, *Dollman vs. Demonic Toys*, *Ghoulies 4*, and *Murder 101*. Once upon a time, you might have watched their films unspool at some rowdy local drive-in; today, if you've seen their work at all, more likely it was as a slightly guilty impulse-rental from your neighborhood video store.

These are the exploitation directors, wizards of the shoestring budget, or as Maitland McDonagh calls them in her *Filmmaking on the Fringe* (New York: Citadel, 251 pp, Paperback, \$18.95), "the Good, the Bad, and the Deviant." Few of their films are family fare; many of them are sleazy. Almost all, as McDonagh explains in her introduction, stand outside the tradition of "American mainstream filmmaking," a tradition of lavish studio productions with big-name stars. And while no director, whatever his stature, can ignore the demands of schedule and budget, these constraints are especially real for those "on the fringe," who must wrestle with them every day; creativity, for these filmmakers, is less about camera angles than about inventive ways of saving time and cutting costs.

Yet they enjoy one particular freedom denied their more respectable colleagues: the freedom to be themselves, to tell it like it is. "And that," says McDonagh, "is why interviews with exploitation filmmakers are both so amusing and so genuinely enlightening. Hollywood icons like Scorsese and Steven Spielberg have carefully cultivated personas they're interested in preserving, and you don't do that by letting people really get behind the scenes. It's no wonder the vast majority of set pieces you read in major magazines are so boring." The raffish independents, on the other hand, "seem outrageous, irreverent, and jaw-droppingly practical about everything from the cheapest way to shoot a tidal wave to how many naked ladies you can show before you go from an R rating to an NC-17.

They have great stories, and they tell great stories."

Wes Craven is one of the big names in the book, along with Joe Dante and Sam Raimi, who can no longer rightly be termed "fringe" directors; but their roots are in that tradition, as is clear from early films such as, respectively, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Piranha*, and

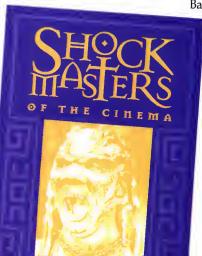
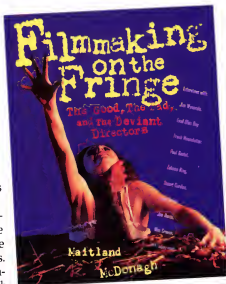
The Evil Dead.

McDonagh prefaces each of the interviews with a short critical profile of the director. She writes, as always, with a slightly bitchy wit and the authority that comes from having actually seen — and sometimes even savored — dozens of obscure exploitation films that less dedicated fans have barely heard of. Her commentaries offer character insights and just plain good writing that one doesn't expect to find in genre-film journalism.

Readers who aren't as savvy as McDonagh — and that makes all of us — may have one problem with this book: The interviews are filled with references to movies we haven't seen and likely know nothing about; and since (perhaps from lack of space) the text provides no plot descriptions, we're too often left out of the conversation. When Paul (Eating Raoul)

Bartel describes an early film, *Private Parts*, as seventy minutes of horror followed by ten minutes of comedy ("for the real hard-core horror fans, it was a betrayal") and tells us that the film's sneak preview resulted in "a tidal wave of parents and children running screaming from the theater," the fun of the story is rather lost if one hasn't the faintest idea what the movie's about.

Filmmaking on the Fringe, Spaghetti Nightmares, and Shock Masters of the Cinema provide fascinating photos and interviews to entertain film buffs.



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10. Luke Skywalker 12 Back action figure, 1977 Kenner, card CS \$59 \$25
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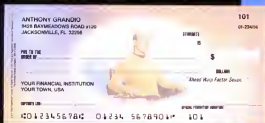


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I felt the same way — admiring, interested, but often left out of the conversation — about *Spaghetti Nightmares* (Key West: Fantasma, 192 pp, Paperback, \$25.95), in which a pair of indefatigable Italian horror fans, Luca M. Palmerini and Gaetano Mistretta, interview more than two dozen figures connected with that country's film industry, from directors such as Dario Argento, Michele Soavi, and Lucio Fulci (who describes himself as "mild, weak ... like all directors of frightening films," and confides, "We aren't exactly a bunch of winners" to outsiders such as Mimsy Farmer, Terence Stamp, and Tom Savini). The interviews, while brief, are certainly knowledgeable — Palmerini and Mistretta seem to know every filmmaker in Italy — but something has gotten lost in translation: Movies are referred to by their original Italian titles (you won't find Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*; it appears as *L'Uccello dalle Piume di Cristallo*), words are misused, wild assertions aren't verified (someone connected with Argento's *Suspiria* claims that "in America it's the best-selling videocassette of all time"), and a lot of the prose is just plain baffling.

That last tidbit is from the book's appendix, a film-by-film guide to Italian thrillers from the '50s to the present. Some of the capsule plot descriptions are intriguing, some, to noninitiates, are puzzling, and some are inadvertently hilarious, such as this entry on *Rats*: "Bruno Mattei's best film about the assault on a futuristic society of a new kind of mutant rat — the species attacks the poor survivors of an atomic disaster. Slow but enjoyable."

A few of the same names show up among the 26 interviews in Loris Curci's *Shock Masters of the Cinema* (Fantasma, 151 pp, Paperback, \$19.95), which boasts an introduction by premiere English horror writer Ramsey Campbell. Frank Henenlotter reveals, "I much prefer making sick, twisted comedies rather than straight horror." Dario Argento diplomatically describes George Romero's segment of their Poe collaboration, *Two Evil Eyes*, as "a little flat." Romero himself, in a later interview, modestly admits, "I'm not much of an action director."

Indeed, in this likably modest collection, the modesty is catching. Producer/director Lloyd Kaufman, the president of Troma — which McDonagh, in her book, describes as a "bottom-of-the-barrel exploitation company whose reputation rests on some of the least accomplished movies ever made" — tells Curci, "I'm basically a film-nut. I love all kinds of movies, and if I was not able to direct films, I would write them I would even carry coffee for other directors, if I had no talent at all. I would be perfectly honored to carry coffee for Mario Bava or Dario Argento."

Annoyingly, the book is rife with errors in proofreading and transcription. On the other hand, just as the title might lead you to hope, the book is packed with dramatic photos from horror movies, many of them satisfyingly shocking. □

CHANNEL NEWS

Continued from page 10

superhero. Why write about such an important topic in a comic book? As Vachss explained on *Anti-Grav*, "I have but this one tune to play, and I play it on anybody's piano that's made available ... If I had one wish, it would be that what I write is fiction." Toll-free phone numbers for child help lines in both the United States and in Canada were posted throughout this episode.

On a lighter note, another episode of *The Anti-Gravity Room* (Braun's personal favorite) featured two real, rival comic book editors literally duking it out in a boxing ring. Mark Gruenwald of Marvel and Mike Carlin of D.C. fought it out while intoning the names of their respective company's superheroes — "Superman!" "Spider-Man!" "Superboy!" "The Flash!" "Quicksilver!" The bout ended in a satisfying draw.

Braun's name appears in the show's credits under "original music." It turns out he wrote, recorded, produced, and played all the instruments ("Except drums. I'm a good drummer, but I'm not a great drummer.") He also mentioned that he used to play in a band with Madonna and that they wrote and recorded a song together, one that has never been released. He hopes to include more segments about music — always with a comic book connection — in future episodes.

"A lot of rock and roll bands have been influenced by comic books," states Braun, citing Primus, Supernova, and Kiss as examples. In fact, Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley of Kiss were recent guests on the show, and Braun hopes this summer's Lollapalooza concert yields some segments for upcoming episodes.

Anything can happen in the world of comic books and its related fields — so check out the Sci-Fi Channel's *Anti-Gravity Room*; it will keep you up to speed. The series is close-captioned, and its web site can be reached at <http://www.antigrav.com>.

In the meantime, I'm fielding a few odd looks from fellow commuters on the Long Island Rail Road when I open my briefcase and start reading comic books — most recently Frank Miller's *Sin City* and Image's *Spawn* — both at Nick's suggestion.

The influence of comic books can be seen around the world, literally. Beginning in August, the Sci-Fi Channel in Europe will air *The Incredible Hulk*, starring Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno. Based on the Marvel comic created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the series follows the struggles of Dr. David Banner to control his alter-ego the Hulk, who emerges whenever Banner is angered.

European fans can also look forward to a "Paranormal Sci-Fi Week," beginning 15 July. Fictional and fact-based programs dealing with psychic powers, missing persons, healers, UFOs, ghosts, and aliens are included in the line-up. Check local listings for exact times. □

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The Series Collection

Dark Shadows

EACH MONTH, Sci-Fi Series Collection in the United States showcases unforgettable favorites and rarely seen gems from the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and classic horror. This month, the Sci-Fi Channel features the new *Dark Shadows*.

People who, like myself, recall rushing home from school every day in order to see the original run of *Dark Shadows* have some harsh realities to face. This July marks the 30th anniversary of the original show's debut on the ABC television network; so now we must soberly admit to having reached our middle age.

From this vantage point, however, we can claim a better perspective on the show's cultural influence. Those who have grown up with Anne Rice's libidinous vampires, or Nick Knight's efforts to live as a mortal man, are less likely to see the relatedness of these phenomena and the Dan Curtis creation. Then, too, consider how popular *Dark Shadows*' locale has become during the last thirty years of horror; long before Stephen King put the town of Castle Rock at the center of all things eldritch, the sleepy seaside town of Collinsport put the state of Maine on the map of horror.

Dark Shadows wasn't entirely without precedent itself; Hammer Studios, then in its heyday, was an undeniable influence, as was the wildly popular "bodice-ripper" style of historical romance that — aside from *Dark Shadows* — has never successfully transposed its brand of fantasy from print to screen.

Though *Dark Shadows* started in the same year as *Star Trek*, the Collinwood Manor remained standing long after the *Enterprise* was mothballed. In its five years on ABC, the series racked up an impressive 1,225 episode run; the current airing on the Channel is the first complete showing of the series since it was first broadcast.

Throughout the show's long absence from home screens, the saga of the Collins clan has retained a large, active fandom supporting conventions, publications — even a small publishing company; Pomegranate Press is owned and operated by Kathryn Leigh Scott, the original Josette, who has graciously embraced the attention of *Dark Shadows* fans.

Following the *Dark Shadows* years, Dan Curtis, the series creator, writer, and director, became one of the very few television producers who could prompt any network interest in horror projects during much of the '70s and '80s. Numerous specials and TV movies appeared under his banner, including Jack Palance in *Dracula*, *Trilogy of Terror* starring Karen Black, and *The Night Stalker*, which



Fans waited twenty-five years for the return of *Dark Shadows*, the historical romance with a tragic bile.

gave the world Carl Kolchak, the news-hound-turned-supernatural investigator.

Curtis also brought a number of potboiler miniseries to the small screen, most notably the NBC ratings blockbusters *Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*.

On the strength of such work, in 1990 Curtis convinced the network that it was time to remount *Dark Shadows*, this time as a "night-time soap," with the bigger budgets and superior production values that the prime-time schedule allowed.

In devising their script, Curtis and his writers (including Matt Hall, son of original cast-member Grayson Hall and original *DS* writer Sam Hall) looked to the crucial second year of the original show. *Dark Shadows* had been transformed when Jonathan Frid joined the cast as the vampire Barnabus Collins with episode #210; Frid's popularity gave the series some much-needed focus, as various plot threads were abandoned, and others reshaped to place the melancholy blood-sucker at their center. The 1991 *Dark Shadows* offered a streamlined, and steamier, version of the second year's storyline, concerning the efforts of Dr. Julia Hoffman (Barbara Steele) to cure Barnabus (Ben Cross) of his vampirism, and the tragic time-spanning love triangle of Barnabus, Josette (Joanna Going) and the wicked Angelique (Lysette Anthony), with Roy Thinnes cast as Barnabus's nemesis, Reverend Trask.

The series debuted on January 13, 1991, with a two-night, four-hour pilot, followed by nine episodes that went by too rapidly for the fans who had waited twenty-five years for the show's return. And perhaps too rapidly for the television audience as well, who barely had the chance to notice the show was there before it was once again gone. □

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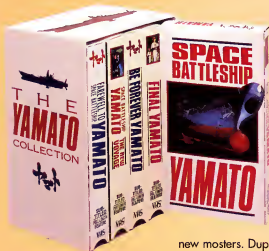
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Hello!

I just wanted to thank you for announcing that you will be showing reruns of *Forever Knight* on the Sci-Fi Channel. Is it possible that they will be run on USA as well? I have been trying for some time to get the Sci-Fi Channel here and I will continue to do so, but I don't want to miss any episodes.

I would also appreciate knowing what *Forever Knight* merchandise is available. I've found shirts and such for other shows, but I'm having real trouble finding any *Forever Knight* items. I would also be very interested in getting video tapes of the series. Where do I get these?

Thank you again for showing this program!

Dianne T. DeSha
Goddess@mailhost.net

We haven't seen much in the way of *Forever Knight* merchandising ourselves, but considering the large number of devoted fans we've heard from in recent months, we expect it's just a matter of time before a smart outfit picks up the license; of course, the level of its performance on the Channel will be a factor in whether that happens. There are no current plans for airing of the series on USA. Tristar-Columbia holds the series' home video rights, but there has been no announcement of a forthcoming release.

Dear Sci-Fi Entertainment,

Just wanted to thank you for the *Quantum Leap* marathon. It was so wonderful! We taped all nineteen hours to share with friends and to see over and over again. Having Scott Bakula host it was an extra special treat.

Thanks for listening to us viewers. (We hope that we don't have to wait another four years for a marathon!) Thanks for giving us quality alternatives in entertainment.

Sincerely,
The Storer Family
Brooklyn Hts, NY

Dear Ed,

I wish you hadn't run all those pictures of the dragon from *Dragonheart*. Couldn't you have covered it without giving that away?

B. Varkentine
Farmingdale, NY

Spoilers are a tricky matter. We avoid them in our reporting but, since we seldom cover a film for a second time after its release, we don't get second chances to run such photos, and the digital star of *Dragonheart* is, bar none, the most gorgeous dragon we've seen on film to date — hard to resist. Besides, within a week of receiving your letter, the pre-release television ads were all over the dial, and allowed an even more abundant eye-ful of the creature.

Dear Sci-Fi Editor:

Hi! I am a *Dark Shadows* Fan and would like to see the whole 1991 "New" DS mini-series on the Sci-Fi Channel again. It was on in May of 1995, and I would like to know which dates it will be on again. Keep showing *Dark Shadows*! Thanks.

Randy L. Uhler
71045.71@compuserve.com

You can return with us to the prime-time version of *Collinwood Manor* beginning July 10th. And, of course, the daytime run of *Dark Shadows* will continue through episode #1,225, late in 1997.

Dear Editor,

Having long been faithful fans of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, my husband and I have also become fans of your publication. Hats off to you for many interesting articles; but, after reading the June, '96 issue, I must point out to you a serious blunder.

Page 14 advises of the production of a film adaptation of "Apt Pupil," which came to us in Stephen King's *Different Seasons* collection. Correct. Then you go on to say that it was also the source for *Shawshank Redemption* and *Dolores Claiborne*. Stop right there! *Different Seasons* was first published in 1982 and contained the stories "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption," "Apt Pupil," "The Body" (from which came the film *Stand By Me*), and "The Breathing Method." *Dolores Claiborne* was first published as a stand-alone novel in 1993.

Please restore honor to the King and my faith in you by correcting this error in print.

Jennifer Kelsey
Pontiac, MI

Dear Editor,

I applaud your magazine's cover featuring the newly resurrected *Doctor Who*. This places you higher in my estimation than certain other magazines, that have yet to give this show equal recognition with *The X-Files* and *Star Trek*. I have only a couple of problems with the article; producer Phil Segal referred to Dr. Who's first producer as a man. Wrong; this may have been mere misunderstanding, but Verity Lambert is a woman.

Segal also said that the show became a

parody of itself during the '80s. Not so. The show has always enjoyed an audience of kids, and each time *Doctor Who* attempted to grow up with its fans, the BBC would clap the show in irons. Blame the '70s, not the '80s, for the degeneration of *Doctor Who*. Screaming females and pedestrian plots are more common in Pertwee's and Tom Baker's eras.

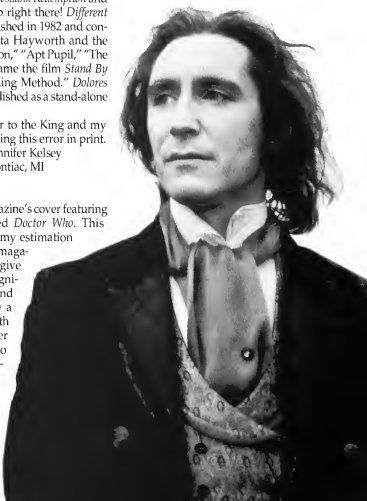
As for the '90s production, I only hope true *Doctor Who* fans (I detest the term *Whovians*) won't be shocked if Segal's venture falls short of its 30-year legacy.

"Time will tell ... it always does."

Jeffrey Leatherwood
Canton, NC

Our *Who* correspondent was livid over the Lambert error, which was not Segal's, but was introduced during copyediting. Seems that Ed Flixman's ThinkPad has a sticky "s" key.

We often cannot reply to our mail personally, but by all means write to Sci-Fi Entertainment, 441 Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 22070. E-mail has a better chance of receiving a reply; reach us at 75663.2701@compuserve.com. Be sure to visit the Dominion at <http://www.scifi.com>.



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